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Serious and earnest Address

T O
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS

K OF ALL
DENOMINATIONS;

REPRESENTING

The many and important Principles, on which their
Dissent from the ESTABLISHMENT is grounded.

X By The Rev. M. Cornish.

My kingdom is not of this world, John xviii. 36.

One is your master even Christ, Matt. xxiii. 8.

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath
made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke
of bondage. For brethren, ye have been called unto
liberty, Galat. v. 1, 13.*

The SECOND EDITION, Corrected and Enlarged.

L O N D O N,

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ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

R E A D E R.

THE Author has been obliged to raise the price of this Pamphlet to double what he at first intended, or it would not have defrayed the expences of publishing. He is greatly obliged to those who encouraged the sale, and has taken care to correct the errors of the first edition. Several things have been added to this; which are inclosed in []; as to what defects yet remain, (which are not apparently errors of the press) the youth and inexperience of the Author, it is hoped, will be thought some excuse.

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A

SERIOUS ADDRESS, &c.

SECTION I.

Brethren, Fellow-Christians, and Protestant Dissenters,

I DO not pretend by this address, to offer any new arguments in favour of our dissent from the established church. So many excellent pieces have been written on this subject, that it would be the highest degree of vanity to attempt it. My design is to draw up the reasons urged by other writers into a small compass, and sell the piece at so low a price, that, not only the poorer sort may be able to purchase it, but others who have a regard to our interest, may be disposed to distribute them. A favour which I can ask with a good grace, since no one can suspect, that the expectation of profit should induce me to publish a four-penny pamphlet. To set the argument in a strong clear light is my aim, but God is my witness, to whom I must give an account as well for what I write, as what I speak; that not one single circumstance is designedly misrepresented or aggravated; if therefore, I have been in any respect mistaken, I am open to conviction, yet if the greater part, or even but a few of the arguments here offered are unexceptionable, every person must then judge for himself with regard to their strength and importance. However, I am not afraid to let them pass under the severest inspection of the most critical eye; not being conscious of having advanced one single objection

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which

which the established church is not justly liable to. The principles of our dissent are so well grounded, our reasons for it so many and important, that I am very certain, were they better known, especially to the younger sort, we should never decline so fast. I pray God, this humble attempt may stir up in the present and the rising generation, a regard for that interest, in defence of which so many and such excellent characters have suffered the loss of all things, and even life itself.

Our ancestors the puritans, having been most unjustly represented by the greatest part of our historians as a set of weak enthusiasts, and by many as a race of hypocrites: I had drawn up a short account of them with an intention to publish it in this address, but finding it could not be done without enhancing the price, with some reluctance I declined it; but since this attempt has met with encouragement, it will soon come out as a supplement to it.

Objections were made to the established forms, in the very infancy of the reformation, even in the time of Edward VI. and that by some of the greatest and best of the reformers, who died martyrs to the cause. The nonconformists through the reigns of queen Elizabeth, James I. and Charles I. were very numerous, eminent for their piety and learning, and no less so for their sufferings from the bishops and spiritual courts. In the reign of Charles I. the attacks made on the civil and religious liberties of the people were so intolerable, that they first of all abolished episcopacy, and then monarchy itself. The presbyterians have been frequently but most falsely charged with the death of Charles I. but the persons who accuse them are either very ignorant or very partial, for their ministers remonstrated against it in the strongest terms, and suffered much in the royal cause. That deed was committed by a set of men who were not so much of any one religious sect as a mixture of all. The presbyterians were very warm in the restoration of Charles II. as he himself acknowledged in his declarations, and made them large promises; but these were all broken. No sooner was the king well fixed on the throne, than an act of uniformity was passed, which the ministers scrupling to comply with, on Bartholomew day

day, August 24, 1662, near two thousand of them were turned out of their preferments in the church, to nakedness and famine, and harrassed by other oppressive acts, so that many of them died in the common prisons. That they were men of learning, piety, and the most extensive usefulness none can deny; of their sincerity they afforded sufficient proof in having endured so much, for the testimony of a good conscience. Numbers of the laity, stood firm to their faithful pastors in those trying times, and when the glorious king William put an end to those cruel persecutions, it appeared, that no less than sixty thousand persons had suffered on a religious account, from the restoration of Charles II. to the revolution of king William; five thousand of whom died in prison. And beside those that suffered at home, great numbers retired to the plantations of America and fled to Holland, to the great detriment of their private affairs, and to trade in general. At a low computation their losses amounted to twelve or fourteen millions, a prodigious sum for those times. Nevertheless they were not discouraged, but stood up boldly for the simplicity of the gospel in opposition to the inventions of men, and not dismayed by their afflictions, contributed generously, when a liberty was given, to build meeting-houses, and support an interest for which they had suffered so much. Let their posterity consider this.

In laying down the reasons of our dissent, it seems natural to begin with the thirty-nine articles.

The clergy are not only obliged to subscribe thirty-nine articles drawn up by fallible men; but upon their induction into any living must read them over, before the whole congregation, and must likewise call God to witness, to the sincerity and truth with which they subscribe them. This bishop Burnet calls a great imposition, and it has been a very heavy burden to many worthy men since his time, and is so even now, as appears from a design on foot of presenting a * petition to the Commons to deliver them from this yoke. I heartily wish them success, if they fail in their attempt, that they may be ani-

[* This petition has been rejected; they did not expect thirty votes in their favour, but so cogent did their arguments appear, that seventy members joined them.]

mated with the same Christian fortitude and zeal for truth, which led our illustrious two thousand ministers (near that number) to leave their preferments in the church, and expose themselves to sharp afflictions; for the testimony of a good conscience and as a proof of their sincerity; of which they had a noble example not long ago, in a worthy clergyman of Ireland, who when he had considered the matter, resigned a living of one hundred and fifty pound per annum, and refused another of equal value, which he might have held together with it. He keeps a school at present, for the support of his family *, [and has not been without friends amongst us; may they be increased in proportion to his deserts !]

Whether or no, the articles are agreeable to scripture is not at present the question, (this however is certain, that they are constantly subscribed by persons, whose sentiments are as contrary to one another, as light and darkness; a circumstance which has occasioned mutual upbraidings) but, what authority is there in the word of God for demanding such a test, and what end does it answer? The only confession required or given in scripture, is that of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and when our blessed Saviour asked his disciples, whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, thou art Christ, the son of the living God. *Matth. xvi. 15, 16.* with which he was so well pleased, that he immediately gave him that gracious promise; thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee, the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This was verified by the success of St. Peter's sermons, *Acts ii.* whereby three thousand souls were converted, and the foundation of the first Christian church laid, and the door of the kingdom of heaven, that is the gospel dispensation, as this phrase commonly signifies in the New Testament, was opened. The exhortations given to try the spirits, to speak the words which become sound doctrine, and other texts relating to the ministers, by no

[* I ask pardon of those dissenters, who assisted this excellent man, for the reflection thrown upon them, in my first edition, and rejoice to find myself so much in the wrong.]

means imply that such confessions were demanded; neither is there any precept to future times with regard to this matter, which was it of so great importance as has been represented, would have been at least hinted at, especially by St. Paul, who solemnly declares to the elders of the church of Ephesus, that he kept back nothing that was profitable, *Acts* xx. 20. And that he had shewed them all things v. 35. which must certainly mean every thing necessary to their present and future welfare as a church. But if there is no ground for such an imposition in the scripture, there may, it is said, be strong arguments drawn from the utility of established confessions. It may be asked therefore, what end do they answer?

The reason given by the compilers, is set forth in their short preface to the articles, *ad tollendam opinionum diffentionem, et consensum in vera religione firmandum*, i. e. literally, to take away difference of opinions, and to establish an agreement in true religion. But how any articles can effect this, is strange indeed. If men have made use of their reason in religious enquiries, and embraced any particular opinions as the result of such sober enquiry; can a set of articles set forth by ever so great an authority alter their notions of things, at once remove them from their settled judgment and bring them to an agreement with such a set of articles? to suppose it is the highest absurdity; it may produce a change in the outward profession, but not in the heart, and whether such a change is desirable, judge ye: such is the absurdity arising from the strict and literal sense. But to prevent diversity of opinions, may be a more favourable and is a more general construction; which must either mean to keep persons of a contrary opinion out of the church, else, as one of her last great champions Mr. White observes, "Every parish might have a system of divinity peculiar to itself, nay there might be diversity in the same parish. The doctor in the morning would teach his people orthodoxy, and the afternoon preacher give them a lecture of rank Arianism. The next Lord's day, a disciple of Socinus, get into the pulpit, and twenty species besides of heretics and enthusiasts, one after another." This evil which he

has represented in so terrible a light, their subscriptions have not prevented. It is not desirable by such means to prevent this diversity, there should be nothing to bias the mind of a Christian, especially of a minister, he should be always open to free enquiry, and not dread to study the scriptures impartially, because it may lead him into sentiments different from the thirty-nine articles, thus making them sit heavy on his mind, and lead him to make pitiful evasions; which will be the case with many honest men, since after all their studies and labours, without this they are undone: for it is the language of the church, subscribe or starve. [Some will say, let them seek other employments; but when a man has spent large sums, and what is of greater importance, the best part of his time in study, and has at the same time a particular attachment to the ministry, how unfit must he be for business. I think any inconvenience should be suffered, rather than act contrary to the dictates of conscience; but humanity is frail.]

The most that can be expected, is a unity of sounds in the bonds of ignorance, or a unity of practice in the bonds of hypocrisy; how despicable the one, how abominable the other! But even such a union has by some been thought desirable, since the peace of the church, as they call it, may be thus in some measure preserved. But it has not effected even so much as this. For it is notorious,

That the doctrinal articles of the church are Calvinistical, as even the most simple may see, who will read the 9th, 11th, 13th, 17th, and 18th. Notwithstanding by far the most considerable part of the clergy, both for numbers and learning, are, and ever since the reign of Charles I. have been Arminians, and very zealous ones. To what sad shifts they have been put, to reconcile this subscription, and solemn declaration, that they are agreeable to the word of God, with their avowed sentiments, is well known. Would to God, that for the honour of Christianity, the very remembrance of these evasions had perished, but while the evil continues, it is the duty of every one to expose it. Bishop Burnet, together with many more, plead that the articles are not so strictly worded, but that men of different sentiments may

may subscribe them, which is a flat contradiction to the declared intention, of preventing diversity of opinions ; however they would fain make it out that they admit a latitude, and that this was probably intended by the compilers. This is contrary to fact.

All the protestant divines of the church, whether puritans or others, were of one mind, and esteemed them Calvinistical ; 'till one Barret, in the year 1595, in a sermon preached before the university of Cambridge, declared against the Calvinistical doctrines of predestination and falling from grace ; which was so offensive to the scholars, that they complained to archbishop Whitgift, and obtained nine articles, which were consented and subscribed to by several other bishops, to be sent down to the university, which the scholars were strictly enjoined to conform their judgments unto, and not to vary from. I am informed that all who take any degrees, are obliged to subscribe them to this day. They enforce the Calvinistical notions, by the strongest expressions language can admit. Not having room for all these, four may serve as a specimen.

I. That God from eternity has predestinated some persons to life, and reprobated others to death.

II. The moving or efficient cause of predestination to life, is not foreseen faith or good works, or any other commendable quality in the persons predestinated, but the good will and pleasure of God.

III. The number of the predestinate is fixed, and cannot be lessened or increased,

IV. Saving grace is not communicated to all men ; neither have all men such a measure of divine assistance, that they may be saved if they will.

However, the Arminian doctrines gained ground, and others joined in explaining the articles in such a sense, as the church for twenty-five years after their being established by authority, and many more from their first compilation, never thought of.

It is likewise worthy to be remarked, that when bishop Burnet had published his laboured Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles, about which he had taken so much pains, and which had been examined and approved by both the archbishops, several of the bishops,
and

and a great many learned divines, (as he says in the preface). The design of which Exposition was to point out the only method of subscription, which would not expose a large majority of them to the reproach of prevarication.

Notwithstanding this seemed to him so necessary, and was so greatly approved by many, yet the lower house of convocation fell upon it with the utmost fury, as a performance full of scandal to the church, and danger to religion, and employed one, in the name of the rest, to write against it, which was accordingly done.

The writer's design was to shew, that the articles were framed to prevent diversities of opinions, and he endeavoured to prove they had done so. These instances seem to shew, that no latitude can be admitted, without contradicting their design, and rendering them useless.

Some say, that they subscribe them as articles of peace; but they are articles of faith, to be believed, not merely acquiesced in, and solemnly subscribed, as agreeable to the word of God. Some would have had bishop Burnet to have explained them in that manner; but judge Burnet, his son, observes, "That there might perhaps be reason to wish, that they had only been imposed as such, but there was nothing in our constitution to warrant an expositor in giving that sense to them."

Others talk of subscribing them as far as they are agreeable to the scripture, but as this will not answer the design of the church, since by the same evasion they might subscribe a popish creed, or the koran of Mahomet*. They must declare that they are, not subscribed them as far as they are, agreeable to the word of God.

Who can read the Athanasian creed, together with the first, second, fifth, and eighth articles, without being convinced, that they are designed to keep out all opposers of the Trinity; yet the notions both of Arius-

[* Some have roundly said that they would do this, and declared it in print; when such however preach up honesty and sincerity, they need something more than a forehead of brass.]

and Socinus are imbibed by numbers of the clergy ; and an ingenious member of that body has lately endeavoured to prove, that such may conscientiously subscribe. It is good to observe what their boasted unity comes to.

No articles can be so strictly worded, but that bad men, for the sake of preferment, will subscribe to them ; others will strain their consciences for the sake of these emoluments, or to get a subsistence, which after they have spent much time and money in their education, they cannot procure by any other means. This must expose the ministry and religion itself to contempt, and after all none be kept out of the church by this method, but honest, upright men, who will not for the sake of worldly advantages, make shipwreck of a good conscience. Blessed be God there have been, and are such who thus support the cause of truth ; otherwise, between popery on the one hand, and deism on the other, true gospel Christianity would in these kingdoms be at a very low ebb.

Let protestant dissenters act consistently with their principles in this great point, never require assent to man-made propositions, but to the bible only. Let the church of Rome, and other churches which claim authority in controversies of faith, do as they please ; we ought to remember, that it is our grand principle, both as protestants and protestant dissenters, that the scripture is a sufficient rule, independant of every other.

The confessions of faith usually given by our ministers at their ordinations, have been objected to us by the champions of the church. To this it is answered, these confessions are voluntary ; they are not imposed by any set of men, but drawn up by themselves, and if delivered in the express words of scripture, will in general (as indeed they ought) give satisfaction. However if any minister should scruple to give in such a confession, which not one in a hundred would do, according to our present custom, no reasonable objection can be made to its being omitted, since the easiest way to judge of the soundness of a minister's faith, is from his preaching and behaviour, and these are likewise sufficient security. For if any man, who does not believe

lieve the great doctrines of revelation, will nevertheless for the sake of a good salary, conduct the service of a Christian church, he would likewise give in any confession whatever, which would contribute to his profit. Ordination confessions, should and in general are considered as voluntary, for the satisfaction of the people not necessary to an admittance into the ministry ; in which respect a little reflection will convince us, that they are of no service at all. Some, therefore, have been ordained without any confession, and if a minister, taking the Greek testament into his hand, says, " This I believe to be the word of God, the " rule of faith and practice to Christians ; as such, I " shall endeavour to understand the true sense of it, to " inculcate the genuine truths and duties of it, and " to live according to it," it is a good confession.

It ought, however, to be remembered, that by law, subscription is required of dissenting ministers, as well as clergymen, to all the articles except three and half. Our pious ancestors did not object to this, for when the protestants first broke off from the church of Rome, many sects started up, with which their adversaries reproached them, saying, now they had left their church, they knew not were to stop, but would yield up all the articles of the Christian faith. To avoid this the wiser way would have been to have pleaded the sufficiency of scripture, as they have since done ; but however particular churches drew up confessions, and altered them as they saw further into the truth. That of the Dutch church was altered sixteen times, till finally settled by the synod of Dort ; and the articles of the church of England were originally forty-two, but three were afterwards left out, and alterations made in others, which practice might have been continued had not their hands been tied up. The nonconformists, therefore, of the last age, were not averse to this practice ; yet though the law continues in force, scarce any dissenting ministers now living, have subscribed, nor could many in conscience do it if called upon. The civil government preserves us from ecclesiastical vengeance on this head ; so that when a great bishop, some years since, threatened to enquire into this matter, the ministers
bid

bid him defiance : and there are few now of learning and note, who would give up their Christian liberty in this point. [And since many amongst them forego the preferments which by conformity they could obtain, it is a clear proof amongst many, that divines are not always actuated by interest.]

SECTION II.

The articles, from subscribing to which the law itself frees us, shall be briefly considered : and it is left to every one to determine concerning their importance and weight. They are the 34th, 35th, 36th, and the first clause of the 20th.

The 35th respects the homilies, setting forth that they contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for the times.

These were composed in the reign of Edward VI. and used instead of sermons, the clergy being at that time so ignorant, as to render this help necessary : That they contain a godly and wholesome doctrine for the most part, may not be disputed ; but to give an unlimited approbation to a whole folio book of merely human composition, (“ and in which upon that account, as Dr. Bennet, an advocate for the church, observes, it would be a miracle if nothing were really amiss, or what an honest man might with a very good conscience dissent from”) is unreasonable.

Article 36, concerns the consecration of bishops and ministers ; and affirms, that the book of consecration of archbishops and bishops, and ordering of priests and deacons, doth contain all things necessary to the consecration and ordering ; neither hath it any thing that of itself is superstitious and ungodly.

That this book contains all things necessary to the consecrating and ordering bishops and ministers in the church of England, no one will deny. That there are some parts superstitious, if not ungodly, seems clear. The bishop elect, at his consecration, is to be presented by two bishops, to the archbishop of the province in this form. “ Most reverend father in God, we present unto you, this godly and well learned man, to be ordained and consecrated bishop.” Is it not somewhat superstitious, that two bishops must present him, and that

that to an officer in the church, called an archbishop, an officer never once mentioned in the New Testament, any more than the rest of the ceremony and to make any thing necessary, in such solemnities, without authority derived from thence is superstitious. To call this bishop elect a godly and well learned man, is, sometimes an ungodly action, since 'tis to be feared that some have been consecrated to this office, with but a little learning, and less godliness.

Again, in the said form of consecration, the archbishop says to the bishop, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop, in the church of God, now committed unto thee, by the imposition of our hands, and remember that thou stir up the grace of God, which is given thee by the imposition of our hands." How the Holy Ghost, and the grace of God, these great gifts, can be imparted by the imposition of their hands, who, if we may judge from their fruits, have neither, (since bishops are not always blameless) we cannot divine.

This is a very high, not to say, a presumptuous claim, without sufficient, if any warrant, from the word of God. It was a power indeed given to the apostles, that on whomsoever they laid their hands, the Holy Ghost should be given, Acts viii. 18. but it no where appears that they did or could leave these gifts to their successors. But, say they, we impart the ordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost as the apostles did the extraordinary gifts of the same Spirit. There is no such distinction made in the scripture, and therefore it may be enquired what is meant by it? The extraordinary, that is, the supernatural gifts, or miraculous powers, have ceased long since; these therefore the bishops do not pretend to confer. The weakness of such a pretence would indeed be evident to every one that could hear and see. If by the ordinary gifts, are meant the Christian virtues, and good moral dispositions of heart, it by no means appears that these are conferred upon the person consecrated, or that they are indued with any qualities in which they were deficient before, if they are, let them shew it, and we will believe them. [Should this however be the meaning, how arrogant the pretence! surely to change and purify the heart of another by merely laying

ing on of hands, is more difficult than by such means to enable him to raise the dead.] Similar to this, is the passage in the form of ordaining priests. "Receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a priest, in the church of God, now committed unto thee, by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven: and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." This however will be considered more largely hereafter, p. 36, 37, 38. just observing here, that this amazing power, which the bishops of the church of England assume, is as high above the power of the kings and emperors of the world, as the heavens are above the earth, the power of investing every priest whom they ordain with a power to forgive and retain sins. Christ gave this power to his apostles, who had likewise other miraculous endowments, which all ceased together, and the apostles never pretended to confer the power of retaining, &c. on any person whatsoever, never presumed to say, I pardon thee, or I absolve thee, neither does it appear that the commission extended farther than this, to publish the glad tidings of salvation, through Christ, to all the world; declaring, that whoever repented, and believed in him, their sins should be forgiven, and they should be saved. Neither can any thinking person believe, that every young stripling, who applies for ordination, is moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon him the office of a deacon, this they solemnly declare, but when it is not the case, it is ungodly.

As for us, we pretend neither to confer or receive any additional powers at ordination, but disclaim it as enormous, it is dishonourable to God to suppose that he would make that necessary, which it would be any way possible for men to deny conferring. This they undoubtedly may; [neither episcopal, nor presbyterian, nor any ordination can be absolutely necessary, a pious good (and if learned the better) man, who finds himself seriously inclined to the work of the ministry, if called to any Christian church, is better qualified without any ordination, than a man deficient in any of these respects, though commissioned by all the bishops in England or presbyteries in Scotland.] Ordaining protestant dissenting ministers is looked upon chiefly as a useful expedient,

for keeping out unfit persons, and solemnly imploring the blessing of God upon the labours of the persons thus ordained, before which it is not the custom to administer either the sacraments of the Lord's supper or baptism, though without doubt as soon as any church approves of and chuses them, they derive their commission from the New Testament, to perform all the offices of pastors.

— Imposition of hands was a ceremony used in ancient times, when they prayed over any person, to distinguish that person from others, and being likewise an apostolical custom, 1 Tim. iv. 14. 2 Tim. i. 6. is retained by us, but would easily be dispensed with, should any one object to or scruple it, because, those gifts are ceased which used to be conveyed by it.

Art. 34. Concerns the tradition and ceremonies of the church, "Setting forth, that whosoever, through his
" private judgment, wilfully and openly doth pur-
" posely break the traditions and ceremonies of the
" church, which be not repugnant to the word of God,
" and be ordained by common authority, ought to be
" rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like."

We approve of the clause, which be not repugnant to the word of God, but at the same time affirm, that it is not lawful to introduce any ceremonies whatever, at least, to make them necessary terms of communion. If the church of England has this right, so has the church of Rome, and therefore according to their own article, whosoever shall in a popish country, through his private judgment, break their traditions and ceremonies, through non compliance with them, shall be rebuked openly, and this rebuke must be somewhat severe, or it will not answer the end assigned, that others also may fear. On this plan therefore they may continue to the end of the world. The last clause of this article, allows, that every particular or national church, hath authority to ordain, change and abolish ceremonies or rites of the church, ordained only by authority, so that all things be done to edifying. That it has authority to abolish them, we acknowledge, because by rejecting the inventions of men, we shall approach nearer to the simplicity of the gospel. It is even allowed on all hands, that the ceremonies enjoined
in

in scripture may be set aside, when by a change of customs and manners, they lose their significancy. Washing one anothers feet was expressly appointed by Christ, and mentioned by the apostles as a pious act, 1 Tim. v. 10. being a mark of true humility. It should be observed, that in these warm countries, they only wore sandals, which scarce came up to the mid-leg, it was therefore a usual mark of civility shewn to a stranger, on entering the house, for a servant to attend with water, washing the feet, being a necessary refreshment. But in this country, it would not be esteemed civility, but officious and troublesome, we therefore are to shew our humility by actions at present more significant. [Anointing the sick with oil, used to produce a recovery, James, v. 14, 15, but such miraculous effects being ceased in the church, it is fit that the practice should.] So the kiss of charity, being the usual method of salutation then, was proper, but in this country, to see men kiss each other, would be ridiculous and disgusting. An order of deaconesses was likewise appointed, Rom. xvi. 1. that is the proper meaning of the word servant) but when this was made an occasion of reproach it was dissolved*. However we cannot allow, the ordaining rites by man's authority, or even changing the old for others, so as to oblige others to an observancy of them; by such means the word of God might very soon, as of old, become void by their traditions, for it is the nature of ceremonies to eat out the vital part of religion, and as every new bishop or race of bishops would probably be for introducing something or other new, we should either be continually fluctuating, or else in time, have such a load as we should not be able to bear.

That clause of the 20th article, to which we object and are by law excused from subscribing, is as follows.

* It does not follow from hence, that we may set aside the Lord's supper, because we are expressly commanded thus to shew forth the Lord's death till he comes, 1 Cor. ii. 26, or baptism, both of which may be practised in any countries. Though if wine cannot be procured, any other liquor may serve as well, as will barley, rice, or oaten bread, instead of wheat, where the latter does not grow,

"The church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in matters or controversies of faith."]

This is similar to the former article, and worthy of particular consideration, since either would justify our dissent from the church, if we had no other objections to make. What is the church here spoken of? Never was a word used in a more vague, indeterminate sense, than this hath been by some writers, and that evidently to serve a turn; may we not however reasonably suppose, that it is used here in the same sense as in the article preceeding it, *i. e.* the 19th, where it is defined thus:

"The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministred, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

What church? what congregation is this to whom this power and authority belong? where is it? who are the members of it? in what part of the world do they live? Does it mean the church of England, how can they prove it belongs to them any more than to the church of Scotland or of Russia? ought it not rather to exist in the church of Rome? we know they claimed it long before this church was established or heard of (as to its present form) certainly they have as good a right to it, and therefore to reject what this venerable mother had established, was on this principle wrong.

If it means every national church, according to the expression in the 34th article, how unjustifiable is their conduct in censuring the national churches of France, Spain and Italy, for then they have this power likewise. Does it mean every particular congregation, which is apparently the true sense of the 19th article? What confusion would not this create, every society would have different ceremonies, all under the cover of authority, so that 'tis possible no two churches would be alike, and the inhabitants of one parish know not how to behave in the public worship of the next. Surely this would not be doing all things decently and in order. How far does this authority go? may they make three ceremonies? yes, the church of England has more, ten: what hinders, they may, like that of Rome, go on to a hundred

hundred; and there is nothing to forbid their encreasing to thousands, it knows no bounds, but an arbitrary power is there claimed. Over whom does it extend? is it over their own members only, or may it, as was formerly the case, force others to compliance? These are very important questions, but it would be difficult to answer them to the satisfaction of any reasonable man.

For any church whatever to lay claim to this power, is a bold usurpation upon the office of Christ, the only king in his church, it is to make the body the head, since such a power belongs only to the head, which is Christ: he hath appointed two rites in his church, and who hath power to introduce a third? Let those who lay claim to such a power, prove it from some text of scripture, clear, express, and full to the purpose: whoever without this claims such authority over their fellow Christians, are not subject to Christ, but encroachers upon his province, and usurp an authority which belongs to him only. It is not to be imagined that Christ who came into this world, to set up and establish a spiritual kingdom, would leave it to weak and fallible men, to draw out the scheme or settle the form of it, or to vary and alter it according to their own humours and fancies to the end of the world. The laws and ordinances of his kingdom are all left upon record in the New Testament, by these only should every true Christian be governed in things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and rejecting all human authority whatever in matters of religion, regard that, and that only as his rule.

And as to authority in matters of faith (in some copies of the articles, controversies of faith) does it imply an authority to make more articles of faith than are contained in the gospel? If so, these additional articles are either necessary to salvation, or they are not. To say they are necessary, would contradict the scriptures, in which are contained *all things that pertain to life and godliness*, 2 Pet. i. 3. it is to make the Christian rule a very defective and altogether insufficient rule of faith. If they are not necessary to salvation, what good purpose doth this authority serve, what valuable end doth it answer? [What occasion for an authority to decide unnecessary disputes?] But, if the meaning be, that the

church hath authority to interpret the rule of faith, and to force its interpretation on those who are subject to its authority, to make this good it must be first proved that the church is infallible, to this no church but that of Rome pretends, and therefore it may claim such an authority with a tolerable grace, but for a church which confesses herself fallible to claim what can only belong to infallibility, is not merely strange, it is absurd and ridiculous. One of these it must mean, or this, that if it should put a wrong interpretation, it hath still power to enforce it.

What protestant will maintain either of these? What papist that will not make a handle of it, to defend all the superstitions of their church? What deist, who will not be led to despise the religion itself, when the ministers and professors of it claim powers, so destructive to the common rights, and so contrary to the common sense of mankind?

Indeed it is said, in the next clause of the article, "It is not lawful for the church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of scripture, that it be repugnant to another."

But who is to judge of this? If the persons over whom this authority is claimed, it then comes to nothing, seeing they may either receive or reject it, but if the church is to judge of this, then here is at once established an implicit faith, in the church, that great principle of popery. And this is the case, for when once a doctrine is declared by the church to be agreeable to the word of God, what end will it answer, for any person or persons to contradict it, for if it has authority in matters of faith, it must mean either to make new articles, or to settle disputed points.

Now such a claim is weak and groundless; the apostles were endued with power from on high, and taught by the peculiar inspiration of the spirit, but they never claimed or exercised such an authority, they decreed no rites or ceremonies as necessary to be used in Christian worship, but what Christ had instituted before he ascended to the Father. They did not require an implicit faith, but reasoned out of the scriptures, and commend-
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ed persons as noble, not because they submitted to their authority, but searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Acts xvii. 2d and 11th verse. After the Jews and Gentiles were converted to Christianity, and submitted to the doctrine preached by the apostles, so far from claiming, they expressly tell them, that they have no dominion over their faith, 2 Cor. i. 24. when the apostle Paul gives the Corinthians some necessary advice, though divinely inspired, so far from demanding a consent on his bare word, he tells them, I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say, 1 Cor. x. 15.

In the first general council, held by the apostles at Jerusalem, they would lay no greater burden than such things as appeared necessary to the Holy Ghost, and to them who were inspired by him, Acts xv. Such as were absolutely necessary to the welfare of Christianity then, but (except fornication, which was contrary to the law of nature, but very common among the Gentiles) were not afterwards obligatory, as appears from St. Paul's reasoning, 1 Cor. x. verse 22d to the end, where we find eating things offered to idols, and consequently the other things forbidden were only to be avoided when they were an offence to any weak brother.

This claim then is not only groundless, having no foundation in scripture, but it is highly presumptuous and arrogant, and we may add, it is hurtful and dangerous. It has been the door to all the corruptions of the church of Rome, and it is by this authority, that so many kingdoms have been enslaved, and spiritual tyranny established throughout Christendom. The slaughter and bloodshed, the havock and desolation occasioned by it is shocking. Emperors, kings, and princes, have been by this set on to murder and butcher their own subjects, or to carry fire and sword into the territories of their neighbours, who have gloriously stood up in defence of that liberty with which Christ hath made them free, in opposition to this usurped authority, which we see is still claimed, though, blessed be God, the exercise of it is in a great measure restrained. Owing to this were the persecutions which our brave forefathers,

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the puritans, endured for more than a century. It was this that lighted up the fires in the reign of bloody queen Mary. It was this that led on Lewis XIV. that execrable man, to persecute with such wanton cruelty his protestant subjects. This occasioned the massacre in Ireland in 1641, when 40,000 protestants were butchered and murdered, without distinction of age, sex, or condition; and that of Paris in 1572, when 10,000 were murdered in one night, and 20,000 more within the space of a few weeks, both lords and peasants, the hoary head, and infants at the breast. This gave rise and support to the inquisition. The time would fail to relate the horrid mischiefs with which church authority is chargeable; suffice it to say, it was this which nailed Jesus to the tree. *The chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death, Mat. xxvii. 1.* and when the civil government would have released him, it was the chief priests and elders persuaded the people that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus, ver. 20. John xviii. 40.

Authority has often consecrated error, nursed ignorance, and suppressed truth. Authority has made knaves: Authority has made fools: But mere authority has very seldom propagated virtue or true religion, nay it is absolutely repugnant to the interest of both. The very claim of this authority is a reproach to Christianity, and an insult upon common sense. For Christ's kingdom is not of this world; it was not set up by any temporal power, nor is to be supported after the manner of earthly kingdoms, by temporal sanctions, but by such as are future, spiritual, and invisible.

As long then as the church of England lays claim to this authority, and requires all her ministers to assent to it, and her members to submit to it, it will be a hard matter to vindicate herself against, and very unreasonable to censure, the errors and superstitions of the church of Rome, since that church can lay claim to authority with at least as good a grace, and they think better. Should every thing else therefore be altered to which we object, yet unless this bold claim is given up, our allegiance to Christ, the only King in his church, justifies, yea obliges us to dissent from it.

It is proper to observe, that subscription to the thirty-nine articles is not only required of those who enter on the ministry, but of every student who enters himself at any college in the universities. But how absurd and unreasonable to demand this of young persons just come from a grammar-school, who in general know nothing about the matter, and considering how much they have been debated among the most learned and experienced men, it cannot be expected that such should be qualified to subscribe them. This method, however, fills them with early prejudices, and being brought so soon under the yoke, it does not sit so uneasy as superior knowledge and discernment might make it. One, if not more, of the colleges at Cambridge have dropt this practice, an example worthy to be followed by every seminary.

SECTION III.

As the church claims an authority as to appointing ceremonies, so it enjoins some on its members, to which the dissenters have always objected.

1. *Kneeling at the sacrament.* That our Lord and his apostles celebrated this rite in the common table-posture of that country, is in general, if not universally, agreed, it seems natural therefore that we should use the posture common to us. Kneeling, however, has been esteemed by many a more decent and devout posture; such would do well to consider, that it is at least probable, that this custom first took its rise, when the absurd and monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation was invented, and when men were so sadly deluded, as to believe that a piece of bread was really converted into the very body, blood, and soul of Christ, and that our Redeemer still continued to be offered up as a sacrifice, expressly contrary to the words of the apostle to the Hebrews, so often repeated, chap. ix. ver. 25, 26, 28. and chap. x. ver. 10, 12, 14. but as these horrid doctrines were rejected at the reformation, when the scriptures began to be read, many thought the kneeling posture should be discontinued, as a remnant of popish idolatry. The church of England, however, continues this, and no person can be admitted to receive the
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Lord's supper, without complying, except they should labour under some natural defect, which does not happen once in a century. This is certainly an infringement on our Christian liberty, the posture contributes nothing to the worthy receiving of it; and as the scriptures have left it indifferent, to impose it is unreasonable, and to refuse submitting to it justifiable. Sitting was the custom pleaded for by the puritans, yet they were willing to leave it to every ones judgment, either to stand, sit, or kneel as they pleased. Kneeling has been practised by some persons in our different churches, and is to this day, none have objected to it, but every one is left to be fully satisfied in his own mind. Had the church done this much, contention would have been avoided.

2. The sign of the cross in baptism, "In token (says that office in the common prayer) "that hereafter the "child shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of "Christ crucified." But however significant this ceremony may be, there is not the least trace of it in the bible? and why are not the spittle and salt used by the papists in this office, the first put into the ear of the child, to denote that his ears shall be open to the word of God, and the salt into his mouth, in remembrance of Christ's disciples being called the salt of the earth; full as significant ceremonies, or at least of equal authority, with the sign of the cross. They were all found in the church of Rome, and why that of England should take the one and leave the two others no solid reason can be assigned, and yet a child cannot be baptized in this protestant church, without the application of this popish relic. Sponsors in baptism will be spoken of hereafter. P. 33—35.

3. Bowing at the name of Jesus, which is expressly commanded by the eighteenth canon. The text Phil. ii. 10. *That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow*, it is acknowledged by the learned of the church doth not authorise or enjoin the practice; and Dr. Nichols, its great champion says, "They are not so dull as to think "that those words can be rigorously applied to this posture." If they can, none but the women obey it, since the men bow only their heads. There is then no shadow

shadow of argument for it either from reason or scripture. And it seems strange, that this reverence should be made at the name of Jesus, which was common to other persons, and not at Jehovah, God, Christ, Messiah, these peculiar epithets; who can account for this?

4. Bowing to the east, if not enjoined by any canon now in force, is universally practised; but to what oriental deity is this worship given? not, surely, to the immense, omnipresent Jehovah? he is an infinite spirit, and alike present in all places, this custom might lead weak men to false, unworthy notions of him. If it be said the worship is paid toward the altar, this is worshipping stones or wood, for the presence of God is not in one part of the church more than another, (though under the Jewish dispensation, his glories were more apparent over the ark) while the bread of God was upon it, those who believed it to be the very body of Christ might do well to pay their homage to it, but now that idol is taken away, what divinity is there in the altar to demand religious homage?

5. The white surplice which the clergy are obliged to wear, is one of the popish relics. Our Saviour's appearing in bright raiment, as white as snow, and the angels being generally said to have appeared in white, Acts i. 10. Mark xvi. 5. Matt. xxviii. 3. &c. have been ridiculously urged in favour of this. Ridiculous, I say, for they might as well use some art to make their countenances shine, or be girt about the paps with a golden girdle, as Christ appeared to St. John, Rev. i. 13. But they had better stay for this till they become like the angels of God, and appear in heaven. And it would be more to their honour to imitate Christ in the humble, mean manner in which he ordinarily appeared, rather than as shining in glory. But it has been said, they ought not to administer the sacraments in the dress which they wear in the streets. Why not? Though under the Old Testament holy garments were prescribed by God, the New makes no difference in them; and if this argument holds good, they should change their other garments, particularly shoes and gloves, which contract most dirt. As to our wearing black, it is not
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that we attribute any thing to colour or cloth, neither is it imposed, other colours are used ; gravity is proper even in dress, but gravity of conduct is most requisite in a minister. The band was formerly a part of dress common to all, and is not at present peculiar to ministers, being worn by councellors and others ; and so far is it from being accounted necessary, that some wear it seldom, and others never. But to make any particular, especially an uncommon dress, absolutely necessary, as the surplice is, leads some to think that the ministerial character consists in the colour and shape of garments, it ought, however, to be considered as consisting in somewhat more important. About the richer attire of bishops and cathedral dignitaries I say nothing * ; but surely the cathedral service is liable to just exception, to maintain, at a great expence, a number of persons to sing and chant away the most solemn prayers, without the least appearance of devotion, or tendency to promote it in others, is at best useless, and to many must be very offensive.

6. The observation of saints days, and such a multitude of fasts and feasts as the church enjoins, so that one or other of them falls on more than half the days in the year, is without scripture foundation ; they are now, 'tis true, but little regarded except that collects are appointed for particular seasons. To record any great deliverance peculiar to our own country, as the 5th of November, &c. seems reasonable, otherwise they may be forgot. For the gift of Christ, and the blessings of the new covenant, God hath set apart one day in seven, by observing which we shall do well. In the observation of other seasons and days, the churches of England and Rome exactly agree in time, and they were appointed by the pope, not by the gospel.

It may be asked, What harm is there in these things ? Much. They are mere human inventions, never appointed by Christ, who is alone our master, Mat. xxiii. 8.

[* I have been informed, that the robes of the prebendaries at Durham, are superb and rich beyond any thing to be seen in popish countries. There is a saying of a Scotch gentleman on seeing these fine dresses, that the whore of Babylon went from thence in a great hurry, for that she had left all her trumpery behind her.]

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nor by the apostles, whom he left to instruct; and therefore, if innocent in themselves, cease to be so when imposed by fallible men. Besides, if one ceremony is introduced, why not five, or ten, or an hundred? Where shall we stop? Will it be pleaded that ceremonies and rites are different from fopperies and superstitions; it will be very hard to draw the line betwixt them. Consecrating water to sprinkle the living, will be deemed a popish foppery, but I will defy the utmost art of man to shew that consecrating ground to cover a dead body, (another decent ceremony of the church, I had almost forgot) is less so; nor can any one upon earth shew that salt and spittle in baptism are less instructive than the sign of the cross. Consecrating churches is an useless superstition, (especially in the manner archbishop Laud was wont to do it) how is it possible to convey holiness to stone walls? The word church, in scripture, always means the people, not the building, Mat. xviii. 17. Acts ii. 47.—v. 11.—viii. 1. 1 Cor. xiv. 4. &c. They met in private houses, Col. iv. 15. Philemon, ver. 2. and in times of persecution in fields or woods. Dissenters build places for this purpose of meeting, without supposing any particular holiness in them, and take off their hats at entering on account of the people assembled. When divine service is not performing, there is nothing more holy in a cathedral than a barn. When power is once given to appoint rites according to the pleasure of men, there is no knowing where it will stop. Things ridiculous and absurd will soon be introduced under the specious name of decent ceremonies. When archbishop Laud, so long the favourite of our high churchmen, was at the head of it, lighted candles were put upon the altar, copes were bought of mass priests, with crucifixes and images of the trinity painted on them; consecrated knives to cut the sacramental bread, cannisters for wafers lined with cambrick lace, and images of the virgin Mary erected, undoubtedly intended to enliven the beauties of holiness in the church, and had it not been for the heroic stand which the puritans and their successors have made against this rite-making spirit, the church of England might by this have fallen little short in these additional

ditional splendors of the church of Rome itself. Such are the fruits of authority to decree rites and ceremonies. Those who can approve them do well to use them; to impose them on others is unchristian, but the church obliges us either to comply with what we cannot approve, or to separate. Very different was the conduct of St. Paul, he preferred suffering the greatest inconvenience, sooner than offend his weak brother, 1 Cor. viii. 13. and is very particular in exhorting to mutual forbearance with regard to these indifferent things, Rom. xiv. 1 Cor. x. 23. to the end. But when the Jews would insist on the Gentiles conforming to the Mosaic ritual, he would not give place by subjection to them, no not for an hour, Gal. ii. 5. and he gives them a noble exhortation to stand fast in their Christian liberty, chap. v. to ver. 15. Let us remember the advice, and as the primitive Christians were thus exhorted not to return to the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, so let us oppose all such encroachments, and never be drawn into a compliance through a pretended antiquity; for this imposing spirit began very early, Acts xv. and it is always the nature of human inventions to destroy the vital spirit of religion, and swallow up true goodness in empty shew and vain foppery; but in whatever any church teaches for doctrines the commandments of men, so far we ought to withdraw from it.

The liturgy or common prayer used in the church of England, is another reason for our dissent. There has been much said lately for composed forms of prayer, and some dissenters favour and use them. In particular cases they may be expedient, but free prayer, where ministers have fluency of speech and matter, seems most natural at least, and whatever may be objected to it, is certainly conducted with great propriety in many of our congregations. Young men, and such as are apt to hesitate, may find it very useful to compose their prayers, and if it does not give offence to the people, writing them down, occasionally may prevent confusion and irregularity. But let this be as it may, our objections to the established liturgy are many, and well-grounded. [Most of the prayers are so short as to have nothing but a beginning and end; neither have introductions always
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any connection with what follows. The prayer for the clergy is thus introduced, "Almighty and everlasting God, who alone workest great marvels; send down upon our bishops and curates the healthful Spirit of thy grace:" Are the bishops and curates such hardened wretches that it would be a marvel if God who giveth liberally should bestow his grace upon them? The confession is not only too general, but the different expressions in it all mean the same thing. Lighten our darkness, &c. in the afternoon service is very ill-timed at three o'clock or before in the summer season. There is one argument against free prayer which I have lately heard: That though the minister prays, the people do not! I acknowledge it, if proper attention is not paid, and persons may be careless even with a liturgy, or in the closet. But if a number of people cannot join in prayer with one, it will follow, that in a private family every one must have his book, and that such as cannot read, and very many are they in some congregations; cannot pray at all, unless the same forms are always used and got by heart, which tends much to promote carelessness in all. Had Solomon at the dedication of the temple, *1 Kings* viii. ? Had the pious Jews, *Nehem.* ix. ? Had the Ephesians, when Paul prayed with them, *Acts* xx. 36. ? Had any of those forms, who will affirm, or even suppose it? But is it to be imagined that the people could not join with those that prayed? It has been affirmed by some, that in the Jewish synagogues there were set forms in which our Saviour and his apostles joined, but as it is very doubtful whether this is fact, it has no weight against the plain and frequent instances of free prayer. Besides, the prayers in which it is pretended our Lord joined, are preserved; should they not then be used in preference to all others? If they are dropt as not being so suitable to Christians; Christians have undoubtedly a right to object to other forms composed by fallible men; and in this they have the example of the apostles, who set up other churches, though their great master attended the synagogues. If forms had been necessary, or in all cases expedient, we should have met with some hint in the New Testament of this sort; and not have been left to draw uncertain inferences, from doubtful matters, only known to the

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learned, and disputed amongst them. See Prideaux's *Connexion*, Part I. Book 6. and Jennings's *Jewish Antiquities*, Vol. II. p. 58—63, on this subject, pro and con.]

There is no liberty given to ministers to contract or alter the liturgy at any time whatever; in churches which have prayers every day, there is just the same form from week to week, from year to year, and so on for ever. There are indeed, collects for particular days, but these are very short. Too much, or what is often repeated, even of the best things, is apt to tire; but were three or four services appointed, or a liberty given to the minister to leave out a part, and introduce one of his own composing, it would make a variety, and surely a person is hardly fit for the office, who cannot occasionally do this with propriety; indeed this liberty is allowed in a prayer before sermon, but owing to the length of the service, this generally is and had need be very short; however this may obviate one silly objection made against free prayer, that men by this means may introduce their own trifling affairs, and even seditious matters in the public congregations. The best things to be sure may be abused, but if men are so very prone to such faults, we see even the church leaves a door open for committing them.

If a dissenting minister should always use the same prayer, the people will sometimes be relieved by hearing other ministers; but whatever minister, or in whatever place our brethren of the establishment hear, it is always the same. If any should ask, how then can attention be kept up in the Lord's prayer? It is answered, it is but very short, and the thought of its being our Lord's own form, gives it weight; but we by no means approve of the frequent repetition of it in the church-service; where, in the morning only of the Lord's day, it is used five times, if there be a communion, seven times; and by the intervention of the offices of baptism, churching of women, &c. much oftener; whereas the primitive church never used it but once in one concourse of service. Free prayer has been objected to as liable to tautologies; but surely the church can never urge this with the least propriety, many of the very
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same prayers occur both morning and evening. Indeed there is but little variation, except in the length. How often do they repeat, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;" and in some churches this is done at the end of every psalm, besides the other places. In the Litany, "Good Lord, deliver us," is repeated eight times; and "we beseech thee to hear us good Lord," twenty-one times in half as many minutes. Prayers for the king are offered up thrice in the morning-service, with many other things of the like sort, which seem absolutely to contradict our Lord's precept, *When ye pray, use not vain repetitions*, Matth. vi. 7. The responses are at least too frequent, and with their continual risings up and sitings down, have oftentimes more of confused noise than appearance of devotion; and may not the very frequent repetitions of the words, "O Lord, O God," bring many, especially of the younger sort, to that shocking habit of taking these holy names in vain. Notwithstanding the serious petition, "Lord have mercy upon us, incline our hearts to keep this law;" and it grieves me to observe, that the dissenters, whose honour it has heretofore been to be free from such looseness of expression, seem daily to be falling into it; 'tis an awful truth, that the Lord will not hold such guiltless. The great Mr. Boyle never mentioned the venerable name of God, without making a pause. A noble example! The phrase, "our most religious king," in the prayer for the parliament, may in some reigns be highly improper; and the term, "most gracious" is applied three times to Charles II. in the office for the twenty-ninth of May, though it is well known he had as little of grace as Nero had of Christianity; the words being used in a civil sense will scarce excuse it, in the service of God it is religiously applied.

Our usual custom of standing at prayer has been represented as very irreverent; but let those blush who call it so, since Abraham stood before God, when he offered that humble supplication for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 22. Of the Levites and all the priests it is recorded, that they stood up; and all the people are called to stand up, and bless the Lord their God, in that solemn address, Numb.

ix. 2, 3, 4, 5. Our Saviour represents two men praying in the temple standing, Luke xviii. 10, 11. yea himself in expresse words, has, if not actually enjoined, yet most fully declared his approbation of this gesture, Mark xi. 25. *When ye stand praying, forgive.* We should be more solicitous about the posture of the mind than the body; if that was so important, prostration, the most humble of all, ought to be used. In family worship, dissenters stand or kneel, as is most convenient, and any who choose it may kneel in public. The shameful practice of staring about, makes standing liable to objections.

The alternate repetition of the psalms by the minister and people is very improper. What sounds very well when spoken as the sentiment of David or Moses, when adopted as those of a Christian, and by this means it certainly has that appearance, loses all propriety, many things being applicable only to the Jews, and those who used the ceremonies of their law, which, in our days, many know little of. Others are not suitable to the milder spirit of the gospel, especially the 109th. They are the wicked against whom these curses are denounced, and though excusable in a Jew, it becomes us to pray for the reformation, not the destruction of the worst, according to the dying example of our blessed Lord, Luke xxiii. 34. The 50th psalm, when read by any minister or other person, is excellent, but when thus read, by way of a dialogue, would lead one to think the parson and clerk were scolding.

Ver. 18, the parson says, "When thou sawest a thief
"thou consentedst unto him: and hast been partaker
"with the adulterers."

The clerk answers, "Thou hast let thy mouth speak
"wickedness, and with thy tongue thou hast set forth
"deceit."

Parson rejoins, "Thou fastest and spakest against
"thy brother; yea, and hast slandered thy own mother's
"son."

Clerk replies, "These things hast thou done, and I
"held my tongue; and thou thoughtest wickedly, that
"I am even such a one as thyself; but I will reprove
"thee, and set before thee the things thou hast
"done."

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This is not the only place where serious matters are thus burlesqu'd; and not only the prayers, but even the scripture-lessons are appointed, and so unequally divided, that some consist of less than ten, others of sixty, and one of eighty verses. It would be much better if the minister was permitted instead of some parts of the Leviticus, and various genealogies, to choose the more plain and instructive parts of scripture, to say nothing of the fables (for the learned esteem them no better) of Bel and the Dragon, Judith and Susanna, and above all, the ridiculous, improbable lie, in the 3d of Tobit, about receiving the fair virgin from the hands of her infernal lover, and conjuring away the amorous devil Asmodæus, by the fumes of a fishes liver. To oblige ministers solemnly to read, if indeed they can be read solemnly, such idle tales in the church, as parts of public worship, is a monstrous imposition, a disgrace to the service, and doing dishonour to Christianity thus to pollute its holy ordinances.

SECTION IV.

Besides using the liturgy, every minister is obliged also to declare his unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained in and prescribed by the book of common prayer.

Surely this is not acting as if the scripture were the only rule of faith; and though all are obliged to make this declaration, upon many it lies very heavy, considerable objections are to be made to the several offices, and some, which to an attentive reader will perhaps appear unanswerable. They shall be mentioned in order, and if there be found one thing in that book, one office or form irrational, unfit, or repugnant to the gospel scheme, surely whoever finds it so, must be hard put to it to give an unlimited consent; for it is not to the general tenor, but to all and every thing in the book this must be given.

The Athanasian creed, appointed to be read thirteen times every year, is, in our opinion, an abomination. Many eminent and good men in the church, have wished themselves well rid of it, and some there are who will not use it; but in this case they act contrary to those rules.

rules which their subscriptions oblige them to obey. Our pious fore-fathers, though none could be more orthodox Trinitarians, subscribed the creed, but disliked the curses, and protested against them, declaring that they did not consider the damnatory clauses as any part of the creed, nor give their assent to them. This was acting openly, and much better than the shuffling pretence of a mental reservation, which some who read it publicly in the solemn worship of God will pretend to. The creed itself is not so intelligible and plain as to be edifying; there are few in comparison who have any notion of what they are reading. How, then, can the unlearned say Amen to it? But the curses annexed are shocking to a Christian ear, what can be said to justify them? Our Lord's saying, *He that believeth not, shall be damned*, is alledged, but our Lord is speaking of his doctrines then delivered, and which were confirmed by so many miracles; and this not merely for refusing assent to this doctrine, but on account of their bad hearts. *They would not come unto the light, lest their deeds should be reproved.* John iii. 20. and *loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,* ver. 19. So, 2 Thess. ii. 12. speaking of those who should be damned that believed not the truth, adds, *but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* Moreover our Lord knew what was in man, and was therefore capable of passing a judgment. How then can weak and fallible men pretend that this gives them a licence to denounce damnation against such as do not assent to a creed of mere human invention, the language of which is to the greatest part of mankind, and even the learned, totally unintelligible. Had our reformers left this with the church of Rome, 'tis very probable many who now subscribe it, would have represented such arrogance as the greatest impiety, and becoming none but those, whose mouths (against such as they call heretics) are full of cursing and bitterness. To say, it means to condemn the doctrines, not the persons, concerning whom some hope may still remain, is false; it is expressly levelled against persons, whosoever does not keep whole and undefiled the doctrine therein delivered, he shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly. Whosoever, every one, which except

a man believe, he. If notwithstanding these decisive and most peremptory declarations, this creed still leaves any room to hope for the salvation of those who oppose the faith therein delivered, the use of language is lost, there is no meaning in words and a man might honestly subscribe the Koran of Mahomet, and reconcile it with the profession of the gospel of Christ. It must be difficult to many, in the presence of God, the elect angels, and the church of Christ, to give their unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained in this creed, but whilst not the smallest preferment can be obtained in the church without this, many will swallow the bitter potion, and some even defend it; and there are those who will do the same by all the errors of popery. It is however well known, that many of the clergy detest and abhor these damnatory clauses, and not a few who even ridicule the doctrines of it, What wonder then if religion declines, and a contempt of holy things so much prevails? May it not almost be said, that the reading this creed in the church thirteen times every year, is more disagreeable to God, (to whom alone vengeance belongeth) and more hurtful in its consequences, than all the oaths sworn in our navy and army within the same space of time? [Can the stoutest defender of it shew, that it is less harm for men to curse their neighbours in a church, than in a tavern.]

As to the office of baptism there is this to object, that without the least authority from reason and scripture, or, as many say, from the ancient practice of the church, the church of England has set aside the parents in this solemnity, and forbid them to stand forth and take upon them the most important charge to which God and nature hath called them; for the 29th canon expressly commands, "That no parent shall be urged to be present at his child's baptism, nor be admitted to answer as godfather for his own child." Other persons are required to appear in the parents stead, and take upon them this important trust. It is not pretended that there is any foundation for this practice in scripture, the reason alledged is, that there may be a double security for the child's education: But as it is pretty certain that such persons scarce ever think

think of fulfilling this trust, so to make this appear plausible, persons of good character ought to be appointed; and it is ordered by the 29th canon just cited, that none shall stand who have not received the sacrament. In country churches, I am certain, this is little attended to; besides, it is further necessary, if this be the reason, that godfathers and godmothers should be of suitable age: whereas very old persons are often chosen for this purpose, concerning whom there is not the least probability they should ever live to see this done; and if the parents are likewise advanced, such can never answer the end. Parents are certainly more interested in this affair than any, they ought therefore at least to be suffered to answer for their children, who would choose it, and those who prefer the other method, retain their liberty.

The vows made are very solemn. "This infant, says the office, must promise by you that are his sureties, until he comes of age to take it upon himself, that he will renounce the devil, and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy word, and obediently keep his commandments; and they are in the name of the child to renounce the devil, and all his works," &c. these are promises which there is no possibility of performing, and to say it means as far as lies in their power, is indeed softening the matter; but the promise is absolute, and no room left for such a latitude. The celebrated champions for the church differ in explaining this mysterious affair. Mr. White says, "The church considers these as the child's answers, only by its representatives; they contain its part of the baptismal covenant, which, because of its tender age, itself cannot utter, is uttered by its sureties." This is to the highest degree ridiculous, for the child has no thought, no understanding, no conception of these things; it cannot be considered or supposed, as being any otherwise than merely passive in the affair. Dr. Nichols, a much greater man, differs much herein, for he says, "The sureties religiously engaged for the truth of the baptized, that they should sincerely believe all that was revealed in the gospel, and direct the subsequent actions of their lives by the law of Christ."

Surely

Surely it is somewhat rash to promise so much for another, and is certainly more than any person can engage to do. If this institution is so useful (and even necessary, as some have termed it, and indeed if it is not, why should it be imposed?) since it is now become a mere matter of form, and the negligence of sponsors so general as to defeat any good designs intended by it, the church ought to exert itself in correcting these abuses. The ceremony of signing with the cross has been already considered, p. 23.

Many have thought that the answer to this question in the catechism, What is required of persons to be baptized? is entirely inconsistent with the practice of infant baptism. The answer is, Repentance, whereby they forsake sin. and faith, whereby they stedfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament. They cannot repent, because they have no sin to forsake; if original sin be meant it is weak, for the child knows nothing about it, and as to having faith in the promises of God, it is impossible, for faith, as St. Paul says, comes by hearing, Rom. x. 17. but how can they believe of what they have not heard? The following question and answer do not seem to mend the matter. Q. Why then are infants baptized, when by reason of their tender age they cannot perform them? *Ans.* Because they promise them both by their sureties, which promise, when they come to age, themselves are bound to perform. But the children promise neither, and if the sureties did it for them, it was entirely without their consent, desire or knowledge, and so the promise lays them under no obligation. Which promise themselves, when they come to age, are bound to perform, is allowed, and so they would if no such promise had been made, or if they had not been baptized at all. Dissenters, who consider infant-baptism as a rite appointed by God, look on it as a standing token of his mercy and grace to them, a perpetual memorial instituted in the church signifying to believers, God's readiness to pour down his spirit and blessing upon them and their infant offspring, and the parents (or if they die, the obligation comes upon some other person) enter into a solemn engagement to bring up their children in the
nurture

nurture and admonition of the Lord. The child neither promises, nor is supposed to promise any thing, but is merely passive.

The next office is that of confirmation. The only text of scripture [for I do not find that Acts xv. 41. was ever supposed to mean any more than establishing the churches in the faith] urged for it is Acts viii. 14, &c. Dr. Whitby, and perhaps most of the clergy, who do not catch at sound, instead of sense, acknowledge it to be nothing to the purpose. Peter and John being sent by the apostles to lay their hands on those whom Philip had baptized and converted, is no precedent for our bishops to do the same. The design was that they might receive the Holy Ghost, that is, the miraculous gifts, such as prophesying and speaking with tongues, visible and obvious to the senses; for when Simon saw, &c. see ver. 18. But our bishops are too wise and modest to pretend to such powers; and as to what are by them called the ordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, we considered when speaking of the office of consecration, p. 14. and shewed that one could no more be conveyed than the other. Neither will this passage make any thing for confirmation, unless the apostles laid their hands on all who were baptized, and if they were then Simon must be confirmed and receive the Holy Ghost; but this was not the case, and since it was necessary that the apostles themselves should come down to confer on them these gifts, the power must cease with them.

“ The business of confirmation is as follows, by order
 “ of the liturgy, all persons baptized, when they come
 “ to competent years, and are able to say the Lord’s
 “ prayer, creed, and ten commandments, and the an-
 “ swers of the shorter catechism are to be brought to
 “ confirmation. The bishop having asked them, whe-
 “ ther they renew the solemn promise and vow which
 “ was made in their names in baptism; upon their an-
 “ swering we do, proceeds hereupon to declare in a
 “ most solemn manner, even in an address to God him-
 “ self, that he (God) has vouchsafed to regenerate
 “ these his servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and
 “ to give them the forgiveness of all their sins, and
 “ laying his hand upon the head of each particular per-
 “ son,

“son, he certifies him by that sign, of God’s favour
 “and gracious goodness to him.” I defy the most
 learned man upon earth to tell me, what warrant any
 bishop has to pronounce a man’s sins all forgiven and
 himself regenerated by the Holy Ghost, upon no better
 grounds than his being able to say the shorter catechism,
 and declaring that he stands by his baptismal covenant.
 This is not the scripture doctrine of acceptance with
 God; nor are the most solemn vows and promises any
 proof of regeneration, for it is not every one that sayeth
 Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;
 and a man’s barely professing to repent, and promising
 to live godly, is not that actual repentance and amend-
 ment of life, which can alone secure the divine pardon
 and favour. How can any man dare presume upon such
 grounds, to assure a person that he is regenerated and
 in a state of favour with God? This however the bishop
 does, and to satisfy every doubt as far as possible, lays
 his hand upon his head to certify him by that sign of
 God’s favour and goodness to him. This practice has
 a very dangerous tendency; many upon such a decla-
 ration from this sacred person, whom they are taught to
 look upon as an ambassador of Christ, a successor of
 the apostles, and a special minister of God, are led to
 believe that they have full remission of their sins, and
 that their souls are in a safe state; and as these are to
 be obtained on such easy terms, it is no wonder so many
 hundreds flock to receive so vast a benefit. The man-
 ner of spending the day at these seasons, affords but
 little proof of any good change being wrought in them
 or good dispositions instilled. Thus the confirmed say
 peace, peace, where there is no peace, by thinking
 themselves absolved, or look upon the whole as a so-
 lemn farce, which they must otherwise do, and thus
 naturally be led to despise all the ordinances of religion.
 Such are the sad consequences of departing from the
 simplicity of the gospel, by introducing human ordi-
 nances. Christ and his apostles, never, as we have heard
 of, appointed any rite after baptism but the Lord’s sup-
 per. Every disciple of Christ is in duty bound to make
 this profession of faith in and obedience to him, let us
 E observe

observe this institution, and not being confirmed will never be any loss to us.

As to the ceremonies to be used in marriage, there is nothing said in scripture, and here therefore we may lawfully submit to the established forms and to such ceremonies as the civil magistrate appoints. Its being done in a church does not make it any otherwise than a civil act, because one building is as holy as another, since there can be no religion in stones or wood, in whatever form put together, and the prayers, pastoral charge, &c. do not alter the case. An oath taken in a common court of judicature has the same appendages, and every whit as solemn, you shall swear to the truth, &c. is a charge, and so help me God, a prayer, as truly as those offered in a church. The puritans scrupled the use of the ring as being a popish custom, and it might have been as well dropt, though there is no harm in using it, nor would there in a bracelet or necklace, if the law appointed either of these in its stead, or added them to it. The words, with my body I thee worship, have been scrupled by some, but lovers are usually complaisant, and therefore the expression may be excused, since all are supposed to be such, at least before the knot is tied, it may also be considered as an equivalent to the *honour and obey*, which displeases so many fair ones. The refusing to marry in Lent, in the same manner as at other seasons in the year, may perhaps be that nothing may interrupt so solemn a fast; however, it seems to resemble no very good character which the apostle speaks of, 1 Tim. iv. 3. one part of which was, forbidding to marry.

Now I grow serious again. The absolution in the office for visiting the sick, we strongly object to, as it favours too much of rank popery. Let the sick person have been ever so vile and profligate, the priest is directed, after some previous exhortations, "To examine
 " whether he believes the articles of the apostles creed,
 " and truly repents him of his sin, and be in charity
 " with all the world, and to move him to make a special confession of his sins, if he feels his conscience
 " troubled with any weighty matter." After which, if he humbly and heartily desire it, the priest is to absolve him

him in the following words. “ Our Lord Jesus Christ,
 “ who hath left power to his church to absolve
 “ all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of
 “ his great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by
 “ his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from
 “ all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the
 “ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

How solemn this form! how weighty this matter! but without good grounds such a proceeding is trifling with the great name of God, and invading the authority of the supreme judge. The apostles had authority to declare, Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, Acts iii. 19. and God hath promised to forgive all such as truly repent, but the presumptuous language *I absolve thee*, is not to be found in scripture, nor because God hath promised to forgive all who repent, can any power be derived to declare this forgiveness to any particular person, merely on account of their professions, for not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, &c. Mat. vii. 21. and surely those of men on a sick and dying bed, cannot be depended upon as signs of true penitence. In the near prospect of eternity, they begin to be alarmed and to cry out for help, but this arising merely from terror, is seldom lasting, of which we see sad evidences in most wicked men who recover, for they again turn to folly. Their humbly and heartily desiring it is no reason why it should be given, for the vilest wretch on earth would desire, and that with strong crying and tears, to have his sins remitted, if such fervent desire would preserve him from the consequences of them. And to what purpose is it to exhort to present repentance, solemnly to warn men not to trust to the sorrows of a sick bed, if there are a number of men obliged, (and the clergy are obliged, and dare not refuse if required) in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to absolve him from all his sins, how great and heinous soever, and thus declare him fully forgiven? Christ gave to his apostles power to remit and to retain sins, but what does this mean? not that persons should be by them absolved, upon their bare professions, and that after a whole life spent in wickedness, but that they should preach the gospel and

declare that those who submitted to the terms of it should have their sins remitted, Luke xxiv. 47. Acts ii. 38.—xiii. 38, 39. and consequently those who would not that their sins should be retained and render them liable to condemnation. This is very different from what the church lays claim to; and surely if the apostles never absolved a man from his sins, only declared they would be forgiven on their repentance, though they had the holy Spirit and such a knowledge of the heart; see Acts v. as none can now pretend to; what a monstrous impiety for fallible men, and especially bad men, for I know and speak it with sorrow, that sometimes a minister is as vile and wicked as the worst in the parish, to assume so great a power, so sacred a trust. It fills me with horror, to hear men declare, in the name of God, they have such a power as they can produce no commission for, and to make use of it in deceiving men in an affair of infinite importance, the salvation of their immortal souls, which the scripture tells us must be secured by a patient continuance in well doing.

Administering the sacrament to the sick, never appears to have been the design of the ordinance. It is a standing memorial of the death of Christ, and always publicly kept by the apostles and their followers. If the sick person has been a good man, and remembered the Lord's death at his table in the assemblies of his saints, he has done all that is required; if he has neglected this, doing it now will not answer the end of making a public profession of his faith in Christ. A sincere resolution to do this if health returns, a good God will accept of; but if the person has been a sinner, (and to the greatest, such as are going to be cut off by the hands of justice for the most flagrant crimes, it is administered) it may tend to fill him with false hopes, whilst at the same time it will be no more service to his soul, than physic to a dead carcase.

The burial service is drawn up with an awful solemnity, but there are passages in it entirely inexcusable, incapable of a sober vindication. Dr. Bennet, (a true son of the church) acknowledges as much, since he says, "It was never intended to be used at the burial of such persons, as die in a state of notorious impenitence,"

" tence, without any appearance or profession of their
 " return to God. I hope therefore that none of my
 " brethren, will ever prostitute this sacred service, to
 " the worst of purposes, to the encouragement of vice
 " and the hardening of sinners; and that they will
 " never change the whole of it into one continued and
 " deliberate falshood by so scandalous a misapplica-
 " tion." So says that learned and high church doctor.
 But is not this office used indiscriminately? Can any
 clergyman refuse to read it over the most scandalous and
 hardened sinner? he cannot without acting contrary to
 the rubric, and exposing himself to a severe prosecution.
 There are but three cases in which it can be refused:
 To such as die unbaptized, to self-murderers, and to
 those who are under the greater excommunication. But
 if men have lived in all excess of riot, if a murderer in
 attempting the life of an innocent person should be him-
 self slain, or a criminal cut off by the hands of justice
 for some atrocious crime, dying hardened and impeni-
 tent, concerning whom, God hath sworn that they
 shall not enter into his rest: Yet, astonishing to relate,
 contrary to the reason of mankind, contrary to what
 the most extensive charity would lead us to conclude,
 contrary to what the scripture repeatedly affirms:
 The church of England nevertheless commands its mi-
 nisters most solemnly to declare over such, That Al-
 mighty God has of his great mercy, taken to himself
 the soul of this our dear brother, here departed, and
 that when they know he was taken away in his
 wrath: They give God hearty thanks that it hath
 pleased him to deliver him out of the miseries of this
 sinful world, when there is the strongest reason to be-
 lieve that he is gone to greater miseries below. And
 pray God that when they shall depart out of life, they
 may rest in him, as their hope is this their brother
 doth. But what ground is there for hope, since where
 Christ is, nothing that is defiled shall enter? This ser-
 vice gives the lie to all those serious exhortations which
 faithful ministers are continually giving to a devout
 and holy life, and contradicts all the arguments they
 draw from scripture, concerning the future misery of
 those who live after the flesh. To declare in the pulpit

that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and within an hour perhaps declare, at the grave of one of the vilest and wickedest in the parish, a sure and certain hope of his resurrection to eternal life, (that is happiness, as the word always signifies in scripture, and in this place, or it will not be an object of hope.) Expressions sufficiently high and confident, even at the funeral of an apostle, must give encouragement to vice or expose the service to the contempt of men of the least reflection.

And what is most strange and astonishing of all, is the more than a miracle which the church performs, in damning and saving the same individual persons. Arians and Socinians, the church declares in its famous creed, will, without doubt perish everlastingly. Yet no sooner are they dead, though they died firmly established in the doctrines which Athanasius damned, the church solemnly declares that God hath, in great mercy taken them to himself, and that it hopes they rest in Christ. But what room is there to hope for those, who, without doubt, perish everlastingly? surely none. "To say that the heresies are damnable, and the persons who espouse them liable to damnation; yet that there may be room for pardon in particular cases, and when one of them dies it may be charitably hoped, that his is such a case that we do not quite despair, is trifling." The Athanasian creed expressly damns the persons, and every person, to talk of pardon and hope, in particular cases, is nothing to the purpose; the service is read over all that die, no one case is excepted but the three abovementioned. The language used is not that of not quite despairing, 'tis the most confident words will admit. They thank God that he hath in great mercy taken the departed soul to himself, and pray they may rest in Christ, as their hope is this Arian or Socinian doth, who, without doubt, says the creed, shall perish everlastingly. Considering these in connection, and a churchman must, or acknowledge he agrees to inconsistencies; what is it but—the expression is shocking, but really it is nothing less than to pray, that themselves may be damned? This being the case with Arians and Socinians, how much greater the inconsistency when a

Deist

Deist is buried, who so far from acknowledging Christ to have had any connection with the Deity, look upon him a sa bold impostor. [This however they could never do if they would take Christianity as it lies in the New Testament without regarding human inventions. These have given occasion to the adversary to blaspheme and their numbers have been greatly increased by the absurdities to which we object.] 'Till the Athanasian creed is rejected, or the burial-service altered, the church acts most strangely, for out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing, which St. James tells us, ought not to be. I appeal to every Christian, whether a solemn assent and consent to all and every thing contained in the book of common prayer, may not well be scrupled, and whether we have not reason to use other forms, and other methods?

S E C T I O N V.

The church of England maintains a threefold order of ministers. Deacons, who may perform any office, except administering the sacrament (at which they can only assist) and pronouncing the absolution. Priests, who may perform all the offices, and bishops, to whom alone belongs the power of confirming baptised persons, ordaining ministers, consecrating churches and church-yards, and as they would have men believe, of governing the church; though in this respect their hands are so tied down by the civil power, that they have nothing but the name; for all the bishops united cannot alter a tittle in the church-service, or make the most trifling alteration in any thing that belongs to it. The law indeed has given them liberty to refuse conferring orders on such as they shall deem unfit, but if a clergyman is presented to a living, however unfit or unqualified he may be, they cannot deny him institution into it, without exposing themselves to a law-suit, which they may probably lose, and this is a risk they do not chuse to run.

Deacons are not properly an order of ministers, being first appointed to take care of the poor, see Acts vi. like our overseers. That some of them preached is certain, as Stephen and Philip, but not the more on account

count of their being of that order, but because they had the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Priest is a name never applied to ministers of the gospel in the New Testament; the name perhaps is retained to support their pretended divine right to tithes, which were with great reason paid to the Jewish priests, since they, as being of the tribe of Levi, were excluded from any share in the division of the land; but this not being the case with the former, and not meeting a word to favour this claim, as descending to them, they took the name for a covering.

But presbyters or elders, (or priests, as the church commonly calls them) and bishops, are not distinct orders, but different names for the same persons. The church at Philippi had but two orders of church-officers amongst them, bishops and deacons, Phil. i. 1. The name, office, and work of a bishop and presbyter are the same. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain elders," that is, presbyters (which is the meaning of the word elder, in our language, and the same word in the original, though our translation has adopted two of the same import) "in every city, for a bishop must be blameless." Tit. i. 5. 7. Paul called the presbyters of the church of Ephesus together, and charged them to take heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them bishops. Our translations have it, * overseers, which is not improper, since it is the duty of a bishop to inspect into the conduct of his flock, Acts xx. 27, 28. so 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. "The presbyters among you I exhort,

* It is probable this was artfully done by the translators, lest the name elders and bishops being so plainly applied to the same persons, might have embarrassed them in their disputes with the puritans.

They did the same with regard to the word congregation, translating it church, tho' the word in the original signifies any assembly whatever, since the same word *ἐκκλησία* is applied to the tumultuous mob at Ephesus, Acts xix. 32. And the word *πάχα* which never means any thing but the Jewish passover, is most strangely and absurdly rendered Easter, Acts xii. 4. This may serve to delude some. What a pity that they could not by some device have found out Christmas and Whitsuntide!

" who

“ who also am a presbyter, feed the flock of God among you, taking the oversight thereof;” that is, performing the office of bishops, as the word *ἐπισκοπῆς* imports. And indeed the superiority of bishops to presbyters, has been acknowledged by the first reformers and founders of the church of England, and many of its learned doctors since, not to be of divine, but only of human institution, not founded upon scripture, but only upon the custom or ordinances of this realm.

What right then our diocesan bishops have to usurp the business of ordination, as belonging only to them, excluding all others from that office, is hard to guess, [especially since it is plain Timothy had the hands of the presbytery laid on him, 1 Tim. iv. 14.] And yet we are often told that we have neither ministers, sacraments, nor ordinances, and that our ministers can never expect a blessing upon their labours, nor the people any benefit from them, for want of their episcopal ordination. Sad, indeed, was this really the case, since the churches in Scotland, and those of the protestants abroad, both in Europe, and great part of America, have no other than presbyterian ordination. In Denmark there are what they call bishops, but as the first protestant prelates received ordination from Bugenhagius, a mere presbyter, they can have conveyed nothing more to their successors. And whence do the church of England bishops derive this power? they must acknowledge that all their validity is derived from the idolatrous church of Rome; yes, this is necessary to keep up their pretended, uninterrupted succession, and apostolic descent. But they abuse this their good mother, from whom they derive these mighty powers, in a strange manner, in one of the homilies; to which every clergyman subscribes, as containing a good and wholesome doctrine. This homily says, “ that the church of Rome is idolatrous, and anti-christian, not only a harlot, as the scripture calleth her, but also a foul, filthy, withered, old harlot, the foulest and filthiest that ever was seen, and that it at present is and hath been for nine hundred years, it is far from the nature of a true church, that nothing can be more.”—What miracles are here! That which is no true church, nor has been

been any thing like for eleven hundred years past (it is now more than two hundred years since the homilies were composed, and Rome is not altered since) yet conveys true, regular, church-offices, and power, and an anti-apostolic church imparts genuine apostolic orders. Can a filthy and corrupt harlot produce any other than a corrupt breed? She may bring forth children it may be said better than herself, but the children must be born in a state of fornication, a spurious race. However if a priest ordained, with all the superstitious and idolatrous rites of this antichristian and false church, comes over to the church of England, he is admitted as a brother duly ordained; but if a minister of any of the reformed churches joins himself to them, he is considered only as a layman, an unordained person, and is obliged to receive ordination again, according to their forms. No, the hands and devout prayers of the most learned, virtuous, religious, and Christian presbyters of Scotland, Geneva, or any such protestant churches, are not so efficacious, it seems, to send forth a true minister of the church of Christ, as the hands and superstitious prayers of an anti-christian, idolatrous, persecuting, and wicked bishop of Spain or Italy. The prelates of the protestant church build their power of ordaining ministers, and administering divine ordinances, upon the orders received from this mother of harlots; if such a fountain, however, imparts any thing, it can be but impure and foul. I appeal to common sense, whether a man is not as well qualified for the ministry, who is set apart to it, by protestant divines, who are, in reality, as much bishops, according to the scripture sense, though not the common application of the word, as my lord of Canterbury or London.

Besides, we do not see a proper agreement between the bishops of the church of England, and the apostolic ones. The very word bishop is derived from *ἐπισκοπος*, which signifies to overlook or inspect, but it is impossible ours can do it. Bishoprics here take in a county, or two, or more. Lincoln includes, not only that large county, but likewise all Leicestershire, Huntingdon, Bedford, Bucks, and part of Hertford. The large and
populous

populous cities of London and Westminster, the counties of Middlesex, Essex, part of Hertfordshire, with all the churches in the East and West Indies, are under the bishop of London's care; who is sufficient for these things? Read the epistles to the bishops, Timothy and Titus, and see wherein they resemble our lord bishops. So far are the latter from being apt to teach, that the Welch ones do not understand the language of the people over whom they are set: They are more in the palace than in the pulpit, and oftentimes more at court than in their dioceses. Neither do they encourage teaching in others, since they frequently bestow livings on their favourites, who have one or two before; the necessary consequence of which is, that some of the parishes must be left to curates, with perhaps a fifth, and often much less, of the income. The best excuse which can be made for them is, that they are only civil officers; and this is the truth of the case. Pray, in what part of the scripture do we read of lord bishops? nor have the clergy any thing to do in the choice of them, but just so far as to render the affair ridiculous, if not impious. The king sends the dean and chapter a commission to elect a new bishop, and a letter, recommending (as it is called, for they dare not, at the peril of losing their preferment, choose any other) some particular divine. On receiving this, the dean and chapter meet to pray God in a most solemn manner, that he would direct them in their choice; (when it is but Hobson's choice; and perhaps the person has been mentioned in the public papers long before their commission arrives) they always fix upon the person named, whoever he is, and yet, in another prayer, return thanks to God for directing them to the choice of so worthy a person, though they know that they were wholly directed by the court, and that, as it sometimes happens, to a very unworthy man. And, is it not a little droll, that when the bishop is to be consecrated, though he and his friends have been using all their interest for years to procure him that office, should nevertheless three times say, *nolo episcopari*, I am unwilling to be a bishop. All this is really shocking to sober Christians, and extremely diverting no doubt to deists, who will make a handle of
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such things to ridicule the whole. As for arch-bishops, deans, arch-deacons, canons, prebendaries, &c. on whom such immense revenues are bestowed, it is sufficient to say, that there is not the least mention of them in any part of scripture; and that they are derived from the same source with popes, cardinals, abbots, monks, friars, and all the useless herds of priests with which popish countries swarm.

Some indeed have said, that deans, prebendaries, &c. are useful in attending prayers in the cathedral; but are those prayers so very acceptable to God which they have, perhaps, hundreds per annum for offering? and what becomes of this mighty benefit, when the same person who has a prebend in the north, has a bishopric in the south, and a cure of souls in the heart of the kingdom. Similar things frequently happen, and there are such cases even now, to say nothing of the time spent in court attendance, levee hunting, &c. As for the hospitality of these dignitaries, few cathedral towns know any thing of it.

That every lay Christian has a right to choose his own pastor, is so plain from scripture, reason, and the practice of the primitive church, that as the very learned Mr. William Lowth, a zealous churchman acknowledges, it can be only ignorance or folly that will plead the contrary. Any one would naturally conclude, that as every man has a natural right to choose his own physician or lawyer*, and that it would be very hard to have one forced upon him, whose abilities he distrusts, so if the welfare of the soul be equal to that of the body, and every good Christian thinks it superior,

[* The author of the religious establishment in Scotland examined, tells us; The people have no more right to choose their ministers, than school-boys their masters: A poor comparison! Boys are unwilling to learn, and must have those set over them, who will even use severity; but persons in years are competent judges of the preaching most profitable to them, and have certainly a right to attend the ministers most adapted to their taste. If they are like school-boys, it must follow, that they deserve correction, if they do not improve under the pastors set over them by patrons of livings; very hard indeed would be the lot of many congregations in this case.]

it is undoubtedly both fit and necessary that every one should choose his minister to instruct him in holy things. This is very clear from scripture; the charges given to Christians to take heed what they hear, to beware of false prophets, not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits; evidently suppose a power to judge of the qualifications of ministers, and to reject such as they disapproved; [consequently to choose others.] When an apostle was to be chosen in the room of Judas the traitor, the whole body of the disciples appointed, by their common suffrage, two candidates for that office. The election was indeed referred to God, but if the choice of one of the two was the act of God, that of two from the whole number, was the act of the whole society; and it is very probable, if they had been unanimous, they would not have referred it to God at all, since the almighty was not displeased with not being first consulted, see Acts i. When the apostles wanted persons to assist them, they did not fix upon them, though undoubtedly well qualified for it, but said, "Wherefore, brethren, look out from amongst yourselves, seven men of honest report, and the multitude chose Stephen, &c." Acts vi. If it should be asked, supposing the majority of a congregation should choose one whom many dislike, what must be done? We say, no one is obliged to submit to the majority, every person is to choose for himself; whoever does not approve the minister chosen, is at liberty to withdraw from the society. Churches ought always to proceed in choosing a minister with great seriousness and deliberation; and the principal supporters of a congregation, or even the majority of it, do wrong to bring in a minister disagreeable to many of the people, and indeed 'tis not every minister will accept such a call. It has likewise been objected, that the minister may survive the greatest part, or even all who choose him, and the society be entirely composed of persons who were born, or came to it after his election. But surely, if persons join voluntarily to a society, it is a sign they approve the minister, and then it is of no consequence if they were not at his first choice, since they as much choose him as if they

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were. It is very unlikely, though it be possible, that he should outlive the greatest number ; but if it should so happen, a worthy character will recommend him to the young, who have been always under his care, and if they disapprove him, they have a liberty to attend any other. A minister is always chosen by those who join his church, as much as if they were present at the first choice. Make the most of these objections, many remain pleased, and generally a very large majority ; but it often happens in the church, that very few, or none, approve the person forced on them, and very large congregations have expressed the strongest dislike to their ministers, without being able to obtain redress. I wonder that our brethren of the establishment can submit to such usage, and that they do not, on such occasions, choose and support a minister they do approve of to administer to them according to the established forms, rather than bear such an imposition. 'Tis true, even then they may be refused the use of the parish church, though perhaps, the rector might consent to it, otherwise, they must put up with the inconvenience, or assemble within unconsecrated walls, without tower or bells, which would perhaps look too much like a meeting. What renders this still the more irksome is, that in parishes where the tythes amount to several scores, or even hundreds, per annum, instead of being served by the rector or vicar, the care of the parish is left to a poor curate, whom they hire as cheap as they can, whose pittance is so small, that he can scarce support his family with decency, much less shew any good example, by charity to the poor. Sometimes two, three, or even four parishes are supplied by the same person, (in what manner any one may guess) whilst he who has all the profits, seldom or never comes to the place. I know of a very large town in the West, where the vicar has not been for many years, but holds two livings besides, at a great distance, and is chiefly employed in rural diversions ; 'tis to be feared there are many such instances. With what propriety then can the church of England be called, the best constituted church in the world ?

The bishops may rectify this matter if they will, since there are laws obliging the clergy to residence. But here

here is the evil: It often happens, and is the case with some of the present bishops, that, besides a bishopric in the north or east, they are rectors of some parish in the south or west, and then, as they cannot reside upon both (though by a statute of the 21st of Henry VIII. a bishop is punishable if he be not resident upon his parsonage, neither will his being constantly on his diocese excuse him) as the evil would fall upon themselves, they shamefully wink at the matter; and even archdeacons, who are termed one of the eyes of the bishop, are so far from always residing, (though the law says, if they are absent for one month together, or two months in the year, they shall pay 10*l* for each fault) that even bishops themselves hold archdeaconries, and that in their own dioceses. The bishop of Bangor, is also arch-deacon of Bangor and Anglesea; the bishop of St. Asaph, arch-deacon of St. Asaph: (these arch-deaconries are always annexed to these bishoprics.) Though the only one belonging to that see. What a strange accumulation of preferments, utterly inconsistent with each other, and of the most fatal tendency to the discipline and good order of the diocese, as well as an ill example to the clergy!

I could greatly enlarge here, but these absurdities must strike every man who will but reflect a moment. Indeed, when I reflect on the large revenues many of the clergy have who do nothing, the small pittance of those who bear all the burden, the number of worthless men who have two or three livings, and the many learned and worthy ones who have but pitiful curacies, together with the shameful manner in which some parishes are served, where there is a decent, and even affluent income for the ministers, and all this in a country where the tenths of so many articles, besides lands and other perquisites are bestowed on the clergy; yet after all, that the people should be deprived of their just and undoubted right of choosing their own ministers; I can scarce write or think without indignation. This is the true cause of the clergy's being so backward in having the most glaring errors altered, (it was thus at the reformation from popery, that glorious work was opposed by the clergy, particularly by those in the highest stations.)

stations.) They do not know where a reformation once begun would end. It cannot be through a regard for the articles, their writings contradict them, but they regard their preferments, which they well know, neither the laws of God or of reason will suffer them to hold. Bishops may send pastoral letters, and deliver solemn charges, the clergy may write books in defence of Christianity, and defend it from the pulpit with all the powers of eloquence; but as long as their practice is so inconsistent with the rules of the gospel, no person can believe their zeal is for Christianity, but for the church, (its revenues) it cannot be for Christ, 'tis for the craft. A noble lord, the most noble in the British senate, if virtue and learning can make him so, being asked the reason why so many of our great men ran into deism? replied, "It was owing to the conduct of the bishops, "for seeing those act so inconsistent with the rules of the "gospel, who, they supposed must understand its evidences, inclined them to think it was all a farce." How long the laity will suffer this spiritual wickedness in high places, I know not; this seems to be a thinking age; and when men apply themselves a little to think of religion, there may be a reformation. Till there is, Christianity can never be supported on the present footing of the establishment; therefore, it is of the highest importance to it, that the dissenting interest should be supported. The dissenting interest, I say, that has been the bulwark against tyranny, against popery, and against deism. The writings in defence of our holy religion by Chandler, Doddridge, Foster, Leland, Lardner, and other such men, who, sooner than make shipwreck of a good conscience, or betray its interest for gain, depended entirely on the benevolence of their people, though they might have been made independant, and raised, without doubt, to the highest dignities in the church, preferment being actually refused by some of them, will be read with attention and patience, even by those who in some things may differ from them. But when men, who have sworn to articles which their preaching often contradicts, when they claim powers, which the gospel they defend declares does not belong to them; when they recommend the conduct of a humble Jesus, and his poor apostles,

apostles, and yet accumulate revenues, claim lordly titles, and busy themselves so much in civil affairs, while the interest of religion is declining, where they may, where they ought, where they solemnly promise to be present to support it; when such men publish defences of Christianity, what success can they expect? Religion is wounded through their sides: But dissenters chuse their own pastors, and have therefore no non-residents, no pluralists, (for the few ministers in and about London, who have two congregations divided betwixt two, cannot be so called) and their ministers are full as respectable a body as the established clergy, and, considering their numbers, have produced as many ingenious, learned, and I am sure, useful men. They have even made the clergy better; many of them have complained, that in towns where the presbyterians have meetings, they have been obliged to preach twice a day lest the people should leave the church; thus have they been kept to their duty against their will. I never knew a town less virtuous, less sober, and less regular for having dissenters in it; but I have known, that where the interest has declined, they have degenerated from this character, with regard to observing the Lord's day particularly.

SECTION VI.

I hope, from this short view, it will plainly appear, that the principles of our dissent, so far from being trifling, as is so often insinuated in various books, and on various occasions, are of the utmost importance to religion; and likewise, that such as are convinced of it, so far from being ashamed of their dissent, will glory in it, and stand up for pure, genuine, scripture Christianity, in opposition to any new editions with corrections and amendments, with additional splendors, and new terms of communion, besides those which Christ made. The church of Rome has done this; and, to every impartial enquirer it will appear, that another church has followed her example. You will perhaps be called schismatics, and schism is a word about which ecclesiastics have made a fearful noise; often, very often, we schismatics have been

damned to the pit of hell, and by the more moderate, treated as obstinate and factious persons. But this said word, my friends, is nothing more than an ecclesiastical scarecrow, fit to terrify the weak, but very contemptible to men of sense. Priests of all countries and all religions, will ring changes on this their favourite word, and schism, schism; schismatics, schismatics; will always be the cry against those who shall oppose their superstitions. The church of Rome lays this charge on the church of England full as liberally as she can on the dissenters; and how does she defend herself? not by her 20th article nor by the 34, no; when a jesuit attacks her, armed cap a-pee, then fathers, authority, church power, the danger of schism, about which her friends talk so gravely to us, are all flung away. Then the bible, the bible only is the religion of protestants; every man is to read and judge for himself, then not those who separate from a church, which imposes unscriptural terms, is guilty of schism, but the church alone which imposes such terms.

This is good protestant reasoning; we stick to it, and therefore, separate from a church, which imposes unscriptural terms of communion, which claims authority in controversies of faith, and have as much reason to call the church of England schismatical, as she has that of Rome. We can do this with a better grace, because we allow to no church such authority, but they do, and it will be very hard to prove, that their church has a better right to do this than that of Rome or Russia. The primitive Christians were looked upon as schismatics by the heathen priests; and should any one of our bishops, out of his great zeal for Christianity, travel into Turkey or China to make converts, the Muffies and Bonzees * would soon stir up the populace by the same cry. The apostle Paul speaks of divisions or schisms, and prayed they might cease: what these were you may see, 1 Cor. iii. where one was saying, I am of Paul, another, I am of Apollos, or Cephas, and he seemed to fear, that this might lead some to build on another foundation, than that which is laid, Christ Jesus, but we regard him only as our law-giver, and therefore are no schismatics, though we cannot submit

* The names of their priests.

to the 20th article of the church of England. This is again spoken of 1 Cor. xi. 18. where we find, that divers abuses were crept into their assemblies, and the women took upon them an undue authority, but, says he, the head of every woman is the man, and he likewise commands, 1 Tim. ii. 12. that the woman shall not usurp authority over the man: But women have more than once been supreme heads of the church of England, endowed with power to make bishops, and to instruct all the clergy, both in what they should, and what they should not preach. Queen Elizabeth prohibited all preaching for a time, and she composed a prayer for the use of her army, so she might, had she pleased, for her clergy. In the reign of queen Anne, Mr. Whiston, having published a book concerning the trinity; all the bishops and clergy met in convocation, addressed the queen, setting forth, that he had advanced several damnable and blasphemous assertions, against the doctrine and worship of the ever blessed trinity; and, in their censure, earnestly beseeched all Christians, by the mercies of Christ, to take heed how they gave ear to those false doctrines. This being their sense of the matter, one would think they should have immediately censured it; but their censure could be of no force, till they had laid it before the queen; and, upon her majesty's opinion it entirely depended, whether these doctrines, which the body of the clergy considered as damnable and blasphemous, were to be rejected by the church of England as erroneous. Her majesty was of a different opinion: So her single opinion, reader, are you not surpris'd? her single opinion had more weight, than that of all the bishops and clergy, those successors of the apostles, and ambassadors of Christ. A fallible woman restrained the whole body of the clergy in the most important part of their office, the keeping out those damnable doctrines, which they prayed the people, by the mercies of Christ, to beware of. This needs no comment, it is historical fact. 'Tis from the reigning king or queen proceeds all power, ecclesiastical as well as civil. The sovereign may make more bishops, as did Henry VIII. he may dissolve a
bishopric

bishopric, as Edward VI. did that of Durham: had not bloomy Mary came to the throne soon after, that rich see might have been utterly lost: He may keep the sees vacant for as many years as he pleases, as did queen Elizabeth, by which means the whole constitution of the church might, in a course of years, be overturned. He may deprive bishops who will not submit to the laws made by the parliament, as queen Elizabeth did fourteen at once for opposing the reformation which she and her parliament were pleased to make in the church, and as king William did seven, for not owning him to be king. In short, all the clergy together cannot make the least alteration in the church, but the king and parliament can make what they please, though all the clergy should oppose it. They have boasted of a divine alliance between church and state, but the former is entirely subject to the latter; we hear, indeed, of the lords spiritual and temporal, but an act is as valid when there is not a bishop upon the bench, as if the whole twenty-six were there, so that they are no necessary part of the constitution, as they would fain be supposed.

The church of England differs widely in many respects from the church of Christ, so that we may separate from one, and still remain members of the other. The church of Christ is a religious establishment, founded upon scripture; the church of England is a civil establishment, founded upon acts of parliament. Into the church of Christ any person may be admitted, who submits to the terms appointed by Christ; but into the church of England, he cannot be admitted without submitting, besides these, to such as human authority has devised. In the scriptural church of Christ, there are no such officers ever heard of as arch-bishops, deans, arch-deacons, chancellors, &c. in the church of England these are officers of great influence, and high rank. I might add more instances, but one shall suffice. If we enquire after the frame and constitution of the church of Christ, we must look for it only in the bible; but if we enquire after the constitution and frame of the church of England, we must look for it in the statute books, canons, common prayer book, and in
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the codes of the English law. In whatever the church of England agrees with the church of Christ, we will readily join with it; but since, in some things they differ, we may be true members of the latter, and yet have nothing to do with the former. Had not the clergy themselves been sensible of some such difference, they would never have made such outcries as they have heretofore, about the danger of their church, since Christ hath promised nothing shall ever prevail against his, Mat. xvi. 18.

Some will tell us, that these things concern ministers only, but the laity have nothing to do with them; this is priestcraft outright. The laity are as much interested in the truths of the gospel, as much obliged to defend them, and as much intitled to the rewards therein promised, as the greatest prelate in the land. The laity must give an account to Christ, how far they have regarded his honour, and those who submit to any unscriptural impositions, when they are persuaded of their being such; or who will not examine into the grounds of them, are full as inexcusable as the imposers. But it has been the fault of the people, as that strenuous advocate for the church, the learned and pious Mr. Hales observes, 'that through sloth and blind obedience, they examined, not the things they were taught, but, like beasts of burden, patiently couched down, and indifferently underwent, whatever their superiors laid on them.' How great this load is, popish countries testify. Italy, the garden of the world, by submitting to the power of priests, is rendered despicable and wretched: The power of the clergy seemed to be rising to an insupportable height in this country since the reformation, for archbishop Laud had the impudence to declare, he hoped to see the time, when no jack gentleman in the kingdom should be suffered to wear his hat before the meanest priest. Our pious forefathers did indeed make a distinction, between ministerial and lay conformity, but when their oppressions were too great to be born, to the honour of the laity be it spoken, when their ministers were ejected, fined, imprisoned, banished, they did not desert, but supported and shared with them

them in all their troubles. The same noble spirit still subsists in many, they will not submit to the authority of the church, and support those honest men who cannot comply with them, by an attendance on their preaching, and the assistance of their purses. That many are grown indifferent to this great cause of religious liberty, is, in general, either owing to an indifference to all religion, or not duly considering the matter. Unless the laity look to it, the clergy will soon triumph, unless they stir in a reformation, it will never come from priests, who are always ready to cry out, the church, that is, their power and revenues are in danger. Without the laity, Christianity would never have spread, popery never have been suppressed, nor pure religion been recovered from thick darkness. Many of the clergy of all sorts have been ornaments to human nature, and laid down their lives for the gospel, but it was their brethren who thus used them, or stirred up the people to do it. A pious, humble minister is intitled to honour and esteem; a careless, haughty one, to contempt, of whatever party he is. [To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith contained in the New Testament is a sacred trust committed to all Christians, and every individual will be accountable for his zeal or carelessness herein.] It is to the laity this apostolic charge is delivered, Rom. xvi. 17. to mark, (i. e. to observe carefully) them that cause divisions and offences contrary to the Christian doctrine, and to avoid them. Now, those who set up ceremonies of human invention, and command the subjects of Christ to submit to them, or refuse to admit such to their communion as will not submit to such rights, reason will tell us, are the men that cause divisions and offences contrary to the Christian doctrine, and such the laity are expressly commanded by the apostle to avoid. If any priest tells a layman it is his duty to submit to what the fathers of the church teach, he should tell him, he will submit to none but Christ; that laymen are as much concerned for the honour of Christ, and the religion of the bible, equally interested in it, equally obliged to defend it as any priest whatever.

As to the infamous principles of conforming to the religion of the country where we dwell, I hope the reader will scorn it, since this will lead a man to be a presbyterian in Scotland, a papist in France, a mahometan in Turkey, and in India a worshipper of the devil. If we are Christians, let us, like the noble Bereans search the scriptures; if we are reasonable beings, let us not be slaves to custom, but votaries of truth. Let us agree to establishments, so far and no farther than they agree with these. Religion is a thing of too great importance to change and vary with customs and climates.

Thus have I represented the principles of our dissent fairly and impartially. If any one should think me too warm, it is the cause which warms me; for I may presume to say, that the honour of my Redeemer, and the purity of his religion, lie near my heart; where these are concerned, lukewarmness is criminal. I sincerely wish this little work may stir up a spirit of enquiry among protestant dissenters, and any others who may happen to peruse it. Those who have time for reading, will gain much knowledge both in civil and religious affairs, from Mr. Neal's History of the Puritans, an excellent work, drawn up with so much care, that after his adversaries had said every thing against it they could invent, their objections were so trifling as to do real honour to it, since so large a work contained so few faults. But as some may not have leisure to peruse this, the Memoirs of the Reformation, by the pious Mr. Benjamin Bennet, or the History of the Nonconformists, prefixed to Mr. Peirce's excellent vindication of the Dissenters, one or another of these may be easily procured, and read with great improvement. Mr. Peirce's work is dedicated to the ministers of the church of Scotland; but though we esteem them as, coming nearer in their form of government to the simplicity of the gospel, than the church of England; yet as they impose some other things as necessary besides the scriptures, we cannot agree entirely with them, and few dissenters, who understand their principles, would join with them now, though our forefathers held them in higher estimation. But a book which I could wish

to see in the hands of every dissenter, and would recommend to any who are desirous of a larger acquaintance with our principles, is, *The Dissenting Gentleman's Letters to Mr. White*, edit. 4. duod. price 3s. 6d.

This may well be called an unanswerable performance, as long as the bible is the rule of controversy, and is writ in so lively and spirited a manner, that it cannot fail of giving pleasure, nor can a lover of religious liberty read it without rapture. I suppose no one will think it worth their while to take notice of this little pamphlet; however, if this should be the case, I would advise them first to read and answer that piece. I have frequently used his expressions, and those who read it will not blame me, since they will see it is impossible to find better. The author of that piece, a venerable minister of the West, scarcely knows me even by name, nor do I him so much as by sight; so that it cannot be partiality to the worthy man, but a regard for the work, that makes me recommend it thus earnestly*.

S E C T I O N VII.

I would humbly offer a few things to the consideration of protestant dissenters. If our interest is so important, ought we not to unite all our strength to support it? It grieves me when I hear of congregations being divided, division soon brings on destruction, and many flourishing congregations have been ruined by it. A bold, factious man, whom all the congregation ought to avoid as a disturber of its peace, has sometimes such influence as to make a minister's situation uneasy, and cause such breaches as will never be healed. This has been particularly the case on choosing a new minister, some are resolved to have their own humours gratified, how much soever the rest of the people are disgusted, and would sooner see them divided, than agree in the election of one who is not exactly suited to their taste. This is not acting with a Christian spirit, we ought to bear with the weaknesses and infirmities of others, as well as to please ourselves. Whoever is attached to any particular sentiments, should consider that others have their prejudices

[* An abstract of that work will be published in a few days, by the reverend author, at the united request of a great number of ministers in town and country.]

too, that we ought therefore to bear and forbear. When any one votes in the choice of a minister, let him consider, that he is to teach others, as well as himself, and therefore they ought to be gratified; else the great work of turning sinners from the errors of their ways, and building up the saints in their most holy faith, the great design of preaching can go on but slowly, where the preacher is not generally approved. If any one thinks him not to be entirely in his sentiments, it ought to be considered, that ministers have an equal right with others to think and judge for themselves; that the best and wisest men have in some things differed, and that the improvement of the whole society should be preferred to the pleasure of two or three persons. Were we always influenced by such considerations, on these occasions, the unhappy divisions would never have happened, which have so much hurt our common cause. May these thoughts be laid to heart, and societies instead of dividing, lay aside their prejudices, and begin to unite, so that instead of two congregations in a town, distinguished by odious party names, we may see one united in love, and the bonds of christian charity. Why should differences in opinion so much divide us? Let ministers confine themselves to scripture language, and adhere strictly to the plainer and more important doctrines of the gospel, then we shall again flourish and revive. For what reason the baptists and presbyterians should be divided in any town, I cannot conceive, where they agree in most other points. Unless the congregations are large, one minister may serve for both, and another be procured to administer the ordinances of baptism in their respective methods; or they may have two ministers, only leaving all disputes out of the pulpits on the Lord's day, and if they cannot do without them, let there be a lecture some day in the week on purpose. Such a union would evidence a true Christian spirit, and by this means many small congregations in the neighbourhood may be supplied, which are now destitute; for when instead of two all meet in the same place, one of the ministers might be spared to assist those who could not of themselves maintain one: This would be doing service to our common interest, supporting religious liberty, and scripture Christianity, without any human

inventions, the principles we all profess, and which are of much greater consequence than those which divide us. This would likewise help to add to the income, which is now frequently so small.

Another matter worthy of consideration is this, there are many congregations which cannot or do not raise more than thirty or forty pounds per annum; the most either of these sums can do is to maintain a single man and hardly that, as ministers are expected to appear, without great frugality; but all know how very insufficient such a salary is to support a family, utterly impossible, where there is a large one. Now, would it not be very right, when two such congregations are situated within seven, eight, or even twelve miles of each other, to content themselves with one minister, who shall preach to them alternately, and the other Sunday some grave, worthy person, read a sermon to the people, and if he does not choose to pray extempore, excellent forms are at hand. Those who consider our present circumstances, may see that this would be a very useful method of proceeding, and I doubt not that every society affords one at least capable of carrying on such a service with decency and credit. It should be the care of such not to grow conceited, and as for any ridicule this might expose them to, it would be beneath the notice of a wise and good man, desirous of promoting, to the utmost of his power, the interest of the Redeemer. Wit and humour will soon die away, but those who have been any way instrumental in promoting the great cause of religion, whether regularly bred to the ministry, or not, will be entitled to the glorious promise, Dan. xii. 3. of shining as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever. By this means the worship of God might be carried on in a very profitable manner to every serious hearer, and ministers would have a more comfortable maintenance: Whereas at present the prospect is so discouraging, that persons are unwilling to bring up their children to that office, many so brought up are obliged to leave it for some other profession, and numbers of excellent worthy men, struggle with such difficulties as humanity cannot think of without a tear. One of the congregations would certainly be under the
disad-

disadvantage of not having the minister resident among them, but he might take opportunities to visit that people, by coming to them on the Saturday morning, or staying till Monday night. If some such method is not adopted, many congregations will soon be without ministers; whereas on this plan, encouragement would be given to young men to fit themselves for the office; and when God sees his people so concerned for the purity of religion, he will raise them up pastors after his own heart. In some towns there may be a large and rich congregation, and a poor one in the neighbourhood; two ministers might preach at them alternately, and the larger congregation give some assistance to the pastor of the poor one, though not to make him equal to their own. Ministers who know what pains must be taken, especially by young men, to prepare two sermons every week, will not object to this regulation, if agreeable to the people, who generally love some variety, and it would be a means of easing both. Many think that the office of a minister is a very easy one, but making two sermons every week (which unless a minister does he sinks into contempt, except the people will be contented with his old ones one part of the day, which some do not like) is to most very hard work indeed, too much for some to bear, and has hastened the death of many excellent men. If then a minister should upon a chance give another's sermon, it is very unreasonable to raise an outcry about it, and account him a lazy preacher.

The importance of our dissent should likewise lead us to be generous in the support of it. Many are so, but others so far from doing what they can, do not what they ought. Our pious ancestors, notwithstanding their severe losses, were at great expence in building those places which their posterity will scarce repair, and risked their all in support of that to which a little is now applied with grudging. The middle sort of people in trade are generally thought to be the most generous. Many of them with a few hundreds in trade, which is very uncertain, will subscribe near as much, and sometimes more than those who have as many hundreds every year, and that too in estates, which run not half the risk; surely this betrays great indifference to the

cause. The poorer sort might contribute something, and even sixpence per quarter, were there are many, might amount to something handsome, if all gave according to their circumstances, which every one knows best himself, there would be less reason for complaint. Many societies in our great towns are certainly capable of assisting others, as well as supporting themselves. The dissenters in London, to their honour be it spoken, have done great things; their example has been followed in some places, though not in many, where there is sufficient ability. This cannot be so much imputed to a want of zeal, as of consideration, was such a thing set on foot, by some active person, in every such town, it would be supported by others: That congregations in the country are by no means backward in occasional collections is evident from the large sums raised in them for America; but considering our own circumstances at home, great prudence should be used in encouraging these applications. If on the Lord's day nearest Bartholomew day, when so many of our worthy ministers were forcibly ejected, a sermon was preached on the principles of our dissent, it would be very useful to the young people; and after that a collection was made in covered boxes, so that every person might be at liberty to put in what they chose, without its being known how much, or how little; it would be a great help to the London funds, now much burthened, whether it was sent up to them, or distributed in the country, as the societies saw fit. It is to be hoped some who truly regard the cause, will set forward this good work.

The rich and fashionable, especially where the interest is low, are apt to forsake the cause, but certainly those who leave the dissenters, merely because going to the established church is more fashionable, would on the same principles throw off Christianity itself in a heathen country. Those who found their religion in reason and scripture, will not be indifferent to what society they join themselves, but attend where they can be best improved, and the rules of the gospel are most strictly observed; you that are guided in the great affairs of religion by fashion, be not deceived, for really you have no religion at all. Others, Demas like,

like, have forsaken us when they have grown rich ; if we enquire after such persons, where shall we find them ? The established church does not encrease, though we decrease. It has been often and truly observed, that when men leave the dissenters, they too often throw off that strictness and sobriety which are essential to a true Christian, and go into that luxury, vanity, and disregard to religion, which it is to be feared will ruin the nation. This is not uncharitable ; it is fact ; I write it with reluctance and grief.

Let not the young be disheartened, because those who know nothing about the matter, may sometimes ridicule them ; *Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, (says Christ, before this sinful and adulterous generation) of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, Mark viii. 38.* Remember that the Christians once were a sect every where spoken against, Acts xxviii. 22. And let those who have hitherto been faithful, resolve to maintain that religion and worship to their latest breath, which they esteem most pure and scriptural, and they shall not lose their reward.

And may all of us, by a conduct and behaviour becoming the gospel, adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things ; for an attachment to the purest church, without real holiness of life, will only expose us to the contempt of mankind, and a severer judgment at the great day.

I have not put my name to this address ; it is needless, that would recommend it to no one, but the importance of the subject merits the attention of every person. I have only to beg, that it may not be slightly run over, and then thrown aside, but that those who approve the design, would distribute it among their friends, and the poorer sort of dissenters, that so our religion being founded in knowledge, we may be no longer wavering and inconstant, but grounded and settled. Much time has been employed about this small work ; should it however in any degree answer the end proposed, it will give me a pleasure not to be described. To the serious perusal of every protestant dissenter, and to the blessing of God I commit it.

P O S T C R I P T.

Dissenting ministers accepting the title of doctor of divinity, has been charged upon them lately as an inconsistency, and a mark of their fondness for honorary distinctions as well as others. If we take the title doctor of divinity in its literal sense, it means no more than teacher of divinity, and is therefore less respectful than master, a common form of address to all men, but as it is always accounted a distinguishing title, it must be remembered it is not conferred on them as divines, but as the reward of literary merit, and so far no dissenter ever opposed any titles. The late Dr. * Harris had made himself known as an historian; a university thought proper to shew their respect to him, and as he was a divine, bestowed that upon him which his labours in history had obtained, and the case is the same with others, they pretend to no high claims, no additional powers, no peculiar distinction above their brethren in the ministry on this account, or give the least approbation to the members of that church who bestow it, but continue the same in every respect as ministers, and receive this merely as a reward of their knowledge in history, philosophy, or any other science as well as divinity. But bishops, as bishops claim an equal title with the peers of the realm, and the archbishop precedes all except the blood royal, they make a part in the great councils of the nation, are highly exalted above all the heads of the clergy, cloath themselves in purple, ride in chariots, all supported at the church's expence, and, to look as much as possible like royalty, call their houses palaces, which no nobleman whatever in the kingdom does that I have heard of. The degree of D. D. in the church, likewise qualifies a man to hold two or more livings, how absurd is it then

* [Of Luppit near Honiton in Devonshire, whose valuable lives of James I. Charles I. Oliver Cromwell, and Charles II. ought to be read by all who wish to see a history *really impartial*. The worthy author would have prosecuted his design farther, but was prevented by death.]

to reflect on our ministers for taking such degrees, as if there was any resemblance between us and them.

However, supposing we are wrong, does this alter the case? Will one man's fault excuse, much less justify another in committing the same. If it is wrong to accept of such distinctions, why does not the church decline them? If there is no impropriety in them, why is it objected to us? Let the case be as it will, it at most only affects some few; thus distinguished, our cause as dissenters will stand good, independant of all the doctors in the world: But the civil powers of the bishops are said to be interwoven into the very constitution, and upon the exercise of their pretended spiritual ones, depends the very existence of the church, a regular ministry and valid ordinances. The title of reverend is also bestowed upon us, but then not claimed by a few, but given to all indifferently; we have no right reverend fathers in God to exalt some above their brethren, as the laity are pleased to shew this mark of respect to the profession, why may it not be accepted as well as that of master or sir? Should any minister however, show any mark of dislike at not being so addressed, his weakness and folly would expose him to pity and contempt.

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